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ויברא
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בצלמו בצלם
אלהים ברא אתו
זכר ונקבה
ברא אתם


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HIGHER LAW.

HIGHER LAW:

A Romance.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'THE PILGRIM AND THE SHRINE.'

Edward Maitland

New Edition. Revised.

'I thought love had been a joyous thing,' quoth my uncle Toby.
'Tis the most serious thing, an' please your honour, (sometimes,) that is in the world.'
Tristram Shandy.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1871.
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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

In *The Pilgrim and the Shrine* was represented a youth escaping from the trammels of traditional belief, and laying himself wholly open to the influences of the living Universe, so as to allow his entire system of religious faith to evolve itself freely from the contact of external nature with his own soul.

In *Higher Law* a similar method is applied to Morals. In its common acceptation, especially on the western side of the Atlantic, the phrase denotes the recognition by two persons of opposite sex of a mutual 'affinity,' strong enough in their own view to justify them in breaking all existing ties whatsoever in order to effect their union with each other: the appeal in such case being from the traditional to an intuitional morality. The main purpose of this tale is to show, not that the votaries of the 'Higher Law' (as thus defined) are at fault in respect of the *basis* on which they erect their moral system, but that they are liable to the charge of arresting the proper development of that system at a point where its operation becomes purely selfish, (in the lower sense of the term,) and therefore immoral.

Thus, in the present story, had Margaret yielded to the attraction of her 'affinity,' (a term by no means to be confounded with 'fancy,') she would have fulfilled the 'Higher Law' in its special and restricted sense. Had she refused to yield to it out of deference to social convention, or fear of consequences to herself here

or hereafter, she would have fulfilled the requirements of the traditional morality; but by adhering to her husband solely through consideration for his happiness and welfare, and resolutely setting herself to endure to the end, however bitter it might be, sacrificing even the ingrained sincerity of her character out of tender regard to his inability to bear the knowledge of the truth respecting the state of her affections, she illustrates the sufficiency of the intuitions to constitute that Higher, or rather Highest, Law of Morality, of which self-sacrifice for the good of those with whom it is our lot to be allied, under the strongest of all inducements to the contrary, is the loftiest result imaginable or desirable.

The difference between the two Moralities is one, mainly, of limitation, the upholders of Conventionalism claiming the sacrifice of the individual as a duty owed to 'Society;' and the advocates of the 'Higher Law' denying that 'Society' is entitled to claim such sacrifice, and resting their denial on the ground, first, that it is through the defective construction of Society that any really serious sacrifice is required; and, secondly, that the general welfare is not really promoted by the infliction of unhappiness upon the individual: rather is it, they hold, for Society to reform its constitution by enlarging its basis so as to render such sacrifices unnecessary. The question is, thus, a part of the larger question of Liberty versus Organisation, or the question to what extent the mass has a right to demand the subordination of the individual to its own convenience, real or imagined. To say that it is to the human passions that the process of reform ought to be applied, is at once to fall back upon the traditional theory that human nature is not so good as it originally was, or was intended to be; an hypothesis from which, postulating as it does a radical defect in the divine work of the Creation, the believers in the 'Higher Law' recoil. Man's nature, they say, is good, though he himself may be ignorant: it is for us, then, to endeavour to amend man's work, namely Society, which is an artificial product, before we presume to find fault with man himself, who is a natural, and therefore divine, product.

Thoroughly to appreciate the dilemma upon which the instance here given turns, it must be borne in mind that the conflict is, for the subject of it, not one of love against duty, but of duty against duty; the duty believed to be imposed by a love that seems to be all heaven-born in its purity and intensity, against the duty imposed by a tie contracted in ignorance of its nature and of the characters of the parties to it; a duty founded in essentials, against a duty springing from accidents.

It must also be borne in mind that it is by no means the purpose of the tale to provide an inflexible rule of conduct for all cases of affinity or incongruity, or to assert that in no instance is a different course justifiable by the 'Higher Law' of unselfishness. Each case must be determined upon its own merits, and with reference to the circumstances and characters involved. But, however flexible the rule of *action*, the rule of *motives* admits of no variation. The most faithful followers of the 'Higher Law' are those who allow the largest play to that which is best in their own nature; and the test of their fidelity does not consist either in conformity to, or departure from, the conventional. Only, the greater the sacrifice, and the farther removed from self the motives which prompt to it, the 'Higher' the 'Law' which is being fulfilled.

Against that wanton asceticism which is apt to take the form of self-sacrifice for its own sake, and the indulgence in which is but a form of selfishness of the lower sort, inasmuch as nobody is the better for it but rather the worse, it is hoped the conclusion of the tale will be accepted as a sufficient protest.

Running parallel to, and closely connected with, the main purpose of the book is an attempt to exhibit the operation of what, to use a now familiar phrase, may be termed *Darwinism* in divinity, or the descent of existing religious types from their physical rudiments.

To a sketch of this—the 'Higher Law' of development in religious ideas—is added an illustration of the 'Higher Law' of

public polity. The book was written while Napoleon III. was still in the plenitude of his power, and published shortly before the outbreak of the Franco-German War. The result of that war has pointed the moral which was here already suggested. Never, probably, in the history of the world did the practice of appealing to the lower motives of men, and ruling a people through the worst side of its character, find more condign Nemesis.

The view here given of the career and character of the Mexican President is at length becoming the view taken by the world at large. Even by those who regarded the execution of Maximilian as an act of unnecessary severity, it is now generally allowed that Juarez is the best ruler that distracted country has ever possessed. While for those who consider that Maximilian brought his fate upon himself by his flagrant usurpation in the first instance; and in the second, by treating as brigands, and refusing quarter to, patriots who were struggling for the independence of their country, Juarez needs no apology for any part he may have had in the matter, founded upon the character of his general career.

Having in the two books already published exhibited the evolution of Religion and Morals out of the contact of the world with the human consciousness, the author cherishes the hope of being able some day to complete the series by a third. Of this, however, it will be time enough to speak when he shall have succeeded in fixing his idea upon paper.

It remains only to add that a few passages which in the former edition failed to convey satisfactorily the meaning intended, have been revised in the present edition.

London, November, 1871.

HIGHER LAW:

A Romance.

PART THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

'This part of mine is just one of the most difficult in the world to act. There is absolutely no character in it.'

So spake Edmund Noel to Sophia Bevan, after a rehearsal for some private theatricals at Linnwood Manor House, North Devon, in the autumn of the year 1857. Such entertainments were a favourite amusement at Linnwood. Our tale does not require a description of them.

'I should not have thought it unsuited to you on that account,' returned the young lady, with vivacity.

'Meaning that——?' he inquired.

'That you have never yet betrayed any such startling decision of character as would ensure your failing in a characterless *rôle*.'

'And, therefore, that having no character of my own, I ought to be the better able to supply one at need? Methinks that in default of your usual logic, the void would be not ungracefully occupied by a little extra good-nature. It is a pity when both are conspicuous by their absence.'

'Brute that I am!' she exclaimed, her fine eyes filling with tears. 'Yet you know that I can't resist my joke, and so you need not be so thin-skinned. I would not let any one say behind your back what I say to your face. You know that well enough.'

'I grant that if I were an eel, and must be skinned, I would rather have it done by you than by another,' he returned.

'You feel the imputation of a want of a marked character

so keenly?' she asked. 'I don't see why you should, when most people who have it are odious.'

'But not all,' said Noel, more tenderly. 'I know of one personage who is by no means odious, and yet has character enough for two.'

'Ah, but then I *am* two,' she answered. 'I am an old woman as well as a young one; a clever woman as well as a stupid one; an ugly woman as well as a handsome one. The fairies who changed me did their work badly, and left two odd halves instead of one whole baby in my place.'

'Poor dear Sophy,' he said, softly. 'Yet why will you not let your friends forget your misfortune, as I am sure they would, if you did not seem to take a delight in reminding them of it?'

'I suppose I am very foolish,' she said; 'but when a woman calls herself ugly it at least prevents others calling her so.'

'On the defensive now!' exclaimed Noel. 'Will you never comprehend that your friends do not need disarming? Regularity of feature does not comprise all the beauty in the world; and if you possess all the other kinds, surely you need not grieve so over the loss of that one. Your friends love you none the less.'

'They are not *in* love with me, though. You are not a woman,' she cried, 'or you would know that beauty is a woman's most precious possession, and that she would give everything else for it. I would give all my brains to have my nice features back again. It is the only thing men really care for. I am a "spoilt beauty" in the wrong sense.'

She spoke energetically, and with a considerable spice of bitterness mingled with her regret. For Sophia Bevan had been a strikingly handsome girl, but had sacrificed much of her beauty of face in a moment of impulsive benevolence. Seeing smoke and flame issuing from a labourer's cottage on her father's estate, at a time when she knew the tenants to be absent at work, she was seized with the idea that they had left their child at home. In an agony of apprehension she forced her way into the burning house. Not at once finding the object of her search, she remained battling with the fire until she fell exhausted and insensible; and was only saved from destruction by the arrival of the neighbours. Sophia was almost as much chagrined at finding that the exercise of her benevolence was superfluous, as at the damage to her beauty entailed by it.

There was no child in the cottage, its mother having, contrary to her custom, taken it with her when she carried her husband's dinner to him in the fields. And Sophia's keen sense of the ludicrous contributed to aggravate the reminiscence. Her face was irretrievably injured. Her fine figure and bright eyes, her dark hair and sparkling ready wit, her rich voice and redundant energy, her largeness of heart and sympathy—these, however, all remained; and after the first years of disappointment she seemed to throw all her energies into her friendships, and to abandon the notion of love as a perquisite to which, through the loss of her beauty, she was no longer entitled. She did not, however, pretend to conceal her dissatisfaction with her changed prospects. The indomitable vivacity of her disposition put all concealment out of her power. In her eyes self-suppression was the most insignificant of virtues. Rather was it a vice, an hypocrisy. Reaction, depression, collapse, or fatigue, even after her most furious fits of fun, seemed utterly unknown to her. She was a sea always at high-tide; a river always brimming over; a wind ever boisterous. Freely allowing that she envied all beauty and its power of attraction, never was she in society without the beauties all envying her. Insipid youths might go to them, but men always flocked around her; and it was always in her circle that the laugh was loudest, the wit keenest, and the wisdom shrewdest.

The years that had passed since her accident, and she was now seven-and-twenty, she had devoted to study with an eagerness and persistency which had their source, not only in her thoroughness of character, but also in her determination to win for herself a new position in society to replace that to which her beauty no longer entitled her. Her father, Sir Francis, who had died several years before the time to which we are referring, was a baronet, of considerable repute in the world of literature and politics. Her mother had died in the childhood of this their only child; and Sophia was now, as was her custom, spending the autumn with her stepmother in a charming country house which belonged to herself, among the wild beauties of the north coast of Devonshire.

Sophia and Lady Bevan were on the best possible terms together. They were entirely independent of each other, and as her ladyship had succeeded to her late husband's house in London, they found it convenient and pleasant to live together, and divide most of the year between the two places. The gentle

and placid disposition of the elder lady enabled her to live in complete accord with her vivacious stepdaughter, to whose movements and wishes it was a pleasure to her to adapt herself, and whom she therefore suffered to rule her house, a task which Sophia certainly managed to perform with complete satisfaction to both parties. There was, accordingly, always an infusion of what she considered the fossil, that is, the eminently respectable, element in their society, for the delectation of her staid relative; while for herself she took care to provide a following of lively and clever companions, who looked up to her as their guiding star.

Bright compound that she was of talent and energy, the statesmen, authors, artists, and savants who had at first been brought into her society through the influence of her father, now sought her for her own sake; or, as she said, for their own. 'You come to me as to an intellectual tavern, and after getting the mental refreshment that you want, go away and think no more of me.'

All who did or could do anything, found in her a ready appreciation and a warm sympathy in their labours. To stupidity and incapacity only was she indifferent. 'Not that she herself could do anything,' she used to say; 'she had no faculty but her voice. Talk she could, and sing,—yes, that was doing something, for it amused others, and it was her creed that everybody in society is bound to contribute something to the general stock.'

Her singing was of that rare order which is best described as dramatic. Rejecting anything weak or trashy, she threw such individuality and clearness of expression into every note, as to make the words mean far more when sung than said. Her rendering of English ballads in particular was really glorious, though she herself preferred her French songs, and declared that she was more French than English, having lived many of her early years in Paris. For the generality of people, her vivacity delightfully transcended the ordinary English type of manner, though the sedater proprieties who sought Lady Bevan's society, were sometimes a little doubtful whether even Sophia's cleverness, heartiness, and thorough purity of feeling, were quite sufficient to justify them in condoning the strong individuality of her manner. One less gifted would probably have fared worse at their hands.

Some of their friends professed to be puzzled by the relations between Sophia and Edmund, and shook their heads at the sug-

gestion of a friendship between persons of opposite sexes who declined to consider matrimony as the be-all and end-all of such friendship. However, it was simple enough to themselves. He was a year the younger of the two. She had no brother; he had no sister. Thrown much together in early youth, they filled the void by the adoption of each other into those relations: and they remained boy and girl to each other, long after they were man and woman for the world.

In the four or five years which had elapsed since Noel graduated, and of which a considerable portion had been spent abroad, there was no apparent change in their relations; no talk of marriage, or of love, and no diminution of friendship. Sophia was fond of him in spite of his being one of those who 'did nothing:' and he was at ease with her as a man may be with one who expects and wants nothing of him but brotherly affection. She had many friendships with men, over whom she exercised an influence which it was evidently a delight to her to increase and to use. Frenchwomanlike, she was a bit of an *intrigante* at heart; but her benevolence and high sense of duty led her invariably to use her influence for good: and many an inward triumph she felt over her fairer friends who confessed their inferiority by coming to her for advice as to their treatment of their tardy or recusant lovers. She sometimes complained to Edmund Noel that she had less influence over him than over many who were far more indifferent to her. He knew that the accusation was true; but he shrunk from letting her perceive its cause. He almost idolised beauty, but hers had never been the kind of beauty that had the deepest charm for him. Even before she had lost that attraction, he had been unable to conceal from himself that his intense appreciation of the gentler feminine qualities, caused him to recoil somewhat from her uncontrolled impulsiveness. For themselves, their relations had soon found their proper level; they felt that the temperature necessary for a closer intimacy was impossible between them; and he felt that however warmly he might value her as a friend, and admire her talent, he could never reconcile himself to the contrast of demeanour which grew out of their opposite temperaments.

Thus, their relation to each other consisted of a firm friendship, tempered by such little outbreaks of sarcastic analysis as that which has already appeared, and in which it must be confessed that Sophia was invariably the assailant.

It was a curious instance of the combination of opposites, for his quietness of manner irritated her exuberant disposition as much as it attracted her. When in a good-humour with him she said that he 'radiated repose.' When otherwise, she was provoked at his calmness. But, the instant he answered her outburst by a sarcasm, she submitted, saying it gave him an unfair advantage over her that he should remain master of himself when she allowed her rage to master her. His customary reticence she interpreted into a rebuke of her volubility. She sometimes affected to think that it concealed passages in his life and feelings which he dared not exhibit. Making no secret of anything about herself, she could not comprehend his dislike of making his affairs or his history the property of his friends. She thought that she knew all about his means and his prospects, for she knew that he had inherited from his father, whose only child he was, a moderate estate in that neighbourhood, which had always been his home, and that he had considerable expectations from an uncle; but of his real principles and aims in life, she felt that their long intimacy had revealed nothing to her; and she did not even know if he had ever been in love! She thought he must have been, for he made no secret of his adoration of beauty; and he revealed so much of his foreign pursuits as showed that he was familiar with the studios of sculptors, and loved to try his own hand at the plastic art. Rumours had reached her, too, of his having been smitten more than once in his wanderings; and once, when Sophia had gained access to a room he had fitted up as a studio at home, she thought she perceived an identity of expression pervading several of his attempts, from which she drew her own conclusions. But he said nothing, only observing generally, when personal gossips were broached, that he thought it worse to say wrong than to do wrong, for the deed might affect the actors only, but the relation of it affected many and multiplied the mischief.

It was on his enouncing such a sentiment one evening that Sophia said with a scrutinising look:

'I wonder how much of that you mean, you horrid sphinx. I believe that you mean it all. You delight in going about like an animated charnel-house, only just managing to keep silence enough to conceal the horrors you contain.'

'Yes,' he replied, laughing. 'The Campo-Santo at Naples is nothing in comparison, for there a few shiny beetles do manage to crawl out in token of the dread deposits within. But the fact

is, I cannot compete with you pure, open-hearted creatures, and so I keep my revelations to myself.'

'Oh, what a delicious bull,' she exclaimed. 'I believe you are like Canning's Knifegrinder: "Story! God bless you, I have none to tell, sir;" and you keep that awful silence to conceal the yawning void within.'

'Well, you must allow that it is very good-natured of me, for you women dearly love a mystery.'

'Meaning yourself. Don't be conceited. If I do love you dearly, it's my folly and not your merit.'

'All grace, as the Calvinists say. Well, so long as it brings me to heaven, one must not criticise the vehicle.'

'Heaven won't do for you. Everybody is transparent there.'

'You know why, I suppose?'

'Why?'

'Because they all understand the language, and none fear to be read awrong: which is probably the reason why you women are called angels; your instinct is never at fault.'

'Except when we are so silly as to care for you men.'

'However,' he added, 'my motive, if I have any, for keeping myself to myself, is probably not quite what you pretend to imagine; but really in part because I am constitutionally shy or reserved, and in part because of my dominant love of liberty. Once let everybody know all about oneself, and one is no longer one's own property. You know all about heaven and the way the angels go on, no doubt; but I can quote Bible for my view of things. Why should I let others into my secrets, supposing I have any, when we are enjoined not to let even our own right hand know what our left doeth? What can be more conclusive against confession?'

'And, so, in private life you are incapable of friendship, for there can be no real friendship without mutual confidence; and in public life you can win no reputation for yourself.'

'In private life,' returned Noel, 'the amount of confidence is determined by the nature of the relationship, whether it be of friendship or of love. My idea of friendship is to accept whatever of confidence may be freely reposed in me, without seeking to pry farther. That is, I accept my friend as he wishes to appear to me, and ignore his other sides. In love I allow no limitations. There, sympathy must be complete, and without reserve. As for winning a reputation among the public by putting my name to any book I may write, or otherwise, I owe

the public no such satisfaction. If they like my book, they are indebted to me for the pleasure or information they may get from it, far more than I to them for their applause or their guineas. Besides, not only should I be no longer my own property, and free from troublesome inquisition, but I should be detracting from the value of my work. Not only do Truth and Beauty need no name of priest or prophet to back them; but with a name the one is apt to become only so and so's opinion, and the other so and so's ideal.'

'Ah! I see you really are meditating a book,' said Sophia, 'but I suspect that there is still another reason at the bottom. You have not the courage to risk a failure. Your motto is, "Better not try at all than try and fail." While I infinitely prefer, "Better to fail than not to try."'

'Then why don't you write something? If your book only be as clever and amusing as your letters and conversation, and half as good as your singing, it is sure to be a success.'

'Ah, everybody tells me so; but I haven't a bit of creative faculty in me. I don't know what an incident is. Nothing real ever happened to me, but once, and then I lost my head, and my face too, and knew nothing about it. I could write only what everybody skips, the reflections. Now if you would write the story, I think I could manage the padding. The fact is, I believe that no single woman can write a book about life and manners without running the risk of making herself ridiculous by some absurd blunders which would come through the want of the experience that marriage would give her. If you would live a life and get into scrapes, and correspond with me about getting out of them, I am sure our letters would make a capital book.'

'Very good; I will get into a scrape at once.'

'On paper; and I will get you out, on paper.'

'You promise?' he asked, seriously.

'But you mustn't behave ill to anybody.'

'Not even on paper?'

'No; I can't have you behave ill anywhere.'

'I am to get into a scrape without behaving ill? Very good. I don't see at present how it is to be done, but I will watch my opportunity. I am to avoid the evil, but court the appearance of it.'

Thus would Sophia Bevan and Edmund Noel have sat and talked together the whole evening, and no one would have

thought it strange; but at this moment Sophia was called upon for a song. She complied, and until the whole party was ready to retire for the night, she sat at the piano pouring out song after song as from an inexhaustible store—French, English, Italian, German, Spanish; accompanying herself perfectly without book or note, and conversing with indescribable vivacity between each with all her visitors in turn, or at once; the centre and life of the whole party. And often after the most touching of her songs, when her audience was voiceless with the silence of threatening tears, she would jump up and utter some joke, and burst into heartiest laughter, as if quite forgetting that others could not keep up with her rapid changes of mood, or avoid being shocked by her incongruities of manner.

On taking leave of Noel for the night, she said,

'That's my idea of duty.'

'I am sorry you have found it so,' he answered; 'to everyone else it has been a great pleasure.'

'You have me there, I grant,' she replied; 'but I do enjoy a good chat with you, and was sorry to give it up. You are such a fitful personage; one never seems to be sure of your being really here. I shall not be the least surprised to find to-morrow that you have set off before breakfast for the Mountains of the Moon, or some other bourne whence postage stamps never return. You are a little moony, you know.'

'Never mind, so long as I am illumined by your sunshine. I ought, however, to be not little, but full, moony, if it be true, as you say, that we are such complete opposites.'

'I think I like the other best, for then you are nearest to me.'

CHAPTER II.

Sophia Bevan was not backward to avail herself of the freedom conferred by her position. A frequent and welcome visitor at the houses of her friends, she insisted on having her own house full in her turn; and each autumn saw her the hostess of a gay and distinguished party of the friends whom she had met

in London during the previous season. She owned that she liked 'Londony' people, and was indifferent to the vegetative denizens of the provinces. Her favourite residences were first, London, then, her own house, when she had a party of London friends, and lastly, Brighton in the winter, because all Londoners went there. Her active mind and strong human sympathies made a real living society absolutely necessary to her. In the intervals of this, she lived upon the strongest food she could find in books, to the comprehension of which she brought a power of abstract thought, and a capacity for generalisation usual only in the most cultivated masculine understandings. It required little effort for her to seize the meaning of the abstrusest philosophical treatise, and assimilate it to her own vigorous mental constitution. Her large benevolence showed itself not so much in giving, as in helping others to help themselves, by infusing her own indomitable spirit of activity into their diffident or despairing minds. She lived as if, believing in no world beyond the present, she must do all she could without loss of time, by way of fulfilling her nature. To a mere lounger in life, sometimes to Noel himself, when indulging in reverie, or pleading delay to her urging him to go and distinguish himself, she would say,—

'Oh, that soul of yours! You will never do any good till you get rid of it. It is only because you fancy you will live for ever, and have plenty of time, that you are so idle. Remember the parable of the buried talents. I apply it to this life.'

Of course, there were not wanting those who interpreted such utterance as a confession of faith; and it may be admitted that those who knew her best were aware that the sentiment proceeded no less from a participation in certain modern developments of thought, than from an intense aversion to any lack of energy, mental or physical, on the part of any one with whom she came into contact.

Equally free from the obligations imposed by an adherence to any particular religious system, Edmund Noel was as great a contrast to Sophia Bevan as can well be conceived. Conscious that he was wasting his years in unworthy indolence, and doubtful as to what might be his proper vocation, he hesitated to commit himself to any occupation that did not completely coincide with his idea of things, and respond to all the exigencies of his nature. He felt himself artist, but not having had the special education necessary to enable him to achieve such high

success as he coveted, in any of the lines which attracted him, he had devoted himself to the desultory study and contemplation of beauty, under whatever guise it might present itself to his view. Beauty in Art, beauty in Nature, beauty in Character, these formed the sole Trinity of his adoration, the sole representative for him of the Infinite in the Finite. Impelled by his mental constitution to seek toward the Absolute, and striving ever to see things in their highest or most complex aspect and relation, he had attained a patience almost divine in his method of procedure with the questions, social and abstract, to which his deeper thoughts were devoted, and which would have been quite divine if mated with a high and practical purpose.

Sophia Bevan was certainly the oldest and greatest friend he had, but her impulsiveness jarred upon him as much as his calmness and patience irritated her; for while he acknowledged the sting of the goad wherewith she sought to urge him on to achievement, he perceived that the effect was to hinder rather than to help him forward. His theory, by which he endeavoured to explain this to her, she either could not or would not understand.

'The mind that would perceive truth must remain at rest. Ruffle its surface or agitate its depths, and the rays from the universe become broken and distorted, and form no definite image.'

This was his idea. Hers was different as their two natures, but each was harmonious in itself.

'The mind that pursues truth must not stand still. Truth is infinite, and the individual is an atom. We are as butterflies or bees in a garden of facts; and the insect that flies fastest and sucks most eagerly, sees most beauty and gathers most honey.'

'Say, rather, devours most juice,' he returned; 'to make it into honey requires a very different process. Herein is our point of difference.'

'I see, I see!' cried Sophia. 'I get the juice, and you make it into honey. I buzz about and find the facts, and you arrange and harmonise them. On those terms we will be friends, and I will tease you no more,—except when you aggravate me by making honey too slowly.'

'Three fine days and a thunderstorm?' he remarked, with a smile of arch interrogation.

'I forgive the insinuation against my temper for the sake of its cleverness. But really we have not had a serious quarrel all the autumn. If we get through to Christmas without one I shall claim the flitch of bacon,' and she laughed heartily at her own joke.

Had Edmund's indifference to establishing a closer relation to her been influenced by the circumstance of her loss of beauty, it would have been impossible for him to have felt at ease in her society. But the consciousness of the difference between their natures had from their earliest intimacy been sufficiently strong to keep him from ever overstepping the limits of brotherly regard. His sense of harmony probably scarcely exceeded hers; but, as she herself said, 'he allowed it to exercise more influence on his life than she considered wise or right.' He said that it was a question of proportion. It was this that made him an unpractical man in her eyes. She declared that he would never join any political party, because of some trifling points of divergence; would never marry till he found a goddess.

'Are you perfect yourself,' she indignantly asked him one day, 'that you think you have the right to have everything perfectly to your liking? Perfect knowledge and a perfect woman! How you will be taken in some day! You are just as likely to fancy you have found the desired perfection in another man's wife, and then may heaven have mercy on you! for you will never see her close enough to lose the illusion. You are not the man to let her run away with you. That would shock your royal highness's sense of delicacy, and you would reproach her for her demonstrativeness.'

The amused twinkle of his eyes recalled her to herself, and before he could speak, she exclaimed,—

'You are always provoking me into saying the opposite of what I really mean! You will go and think now that I have been scolding you for not running away with a married woman. I always say you are the most immoral man I know,—you make me say such things, while you all the time look knowing and say nothing. I hate people to be always afraid of committing themselves. I tell you everything, and you tell me nothing, which I call unfair, and a dereliction of our friendship.'

'I assure you that I am no conscious hypocrite,' he replied. 'My reserve is only the natural reaction from your openness.

We both do what we can do best. Like the blessed Glendoveer,—

"'Tis yours to speak, and mine to hear."

One ingredient of sociability is to excite conversation in others without obtruding oneself.'

'Well, you certainly have a talent for drawing people out without revealing yourself. You are a sort of mental precipice which people go to the edge of, and look over, and straightway fling themselves down.'

'I hope they fall softly,' returned Edmund, laughing. 'But, supposing your account to be correct, surely it merely means that being self-contained and reticent about myself and my own affairs, people repose confidence in me in the belief that I shall be equally so about them and theirs.'

'I don't believe it is anything half so nice,' answered the lady. 'People take you for a yawning grave, and hasten to you to bury their secrets in oblivion.'

CHAPTER III.

In addition to the society of its brilliant owner, Linnwood Manor afforded excellent sport of various kinds, of which the gentlemen of the party there assembled were not backward to avail themselves. The leadership of the shooting-parties, which usually sallied forth immediately after breakfast, was tacitly, and as a matter of course, accorded to the well-known author and man of the world, Lord Littmass, who, as a cousin of Lady Bevan, an old friend of Sir Francis, and a peer of Scotland, was treated by both Lady Bevan and her step-daughter with much consideration. It was he who occupied the place of master of the house at the dinner-table; to him they applied for advice in any emergency; and his keen judgment, consummate worldly knowledge, and great success in every line that he had followed, made him one of Sophia's greatest favourites. She often held him up to Noel as an example which in many respects he would do well to imitate.

Much as Noel admired him in a literary point of view, he

rarely felt at ease in his society. Lord Littmass was not one of those men to whose presence any one would be indifferent. He was far too dominant an ingredient in any society in which he might be, to be ignored. The talent shown in his conversation and writings delighted Noel, who readily admitted that if he had a story worth telling, Lord Littmass was the man to whom he should go for historian. But with regard to the man himself he felt an instinctive distrust. Confessing the nobility of the sentiments contained in his writings, he yet doubted the genuineness of his character. Sophia rallied him about his neglecting to cultivate the acquaintance of so eminent a man, and sought the reason of his aversion. Edmund answered that he was content with knowing him by his writings, and, on being pressed, added that he thought it unfair to seek to know more of one who had put so much of himself before the world; that a monopoly of all excellence was not to be looked for in anybody; and that it was unreasonable to expect that one who had proved himself so admirable in books, should be equally admirable in reality. He allowed, however, that he had nothing whatever against Lord Littmass; it was only a jar arising from difference of character, and he suggested to her that, slight though it might be, nothing was so likely to increase and to fix it as being called on to explain or account for it.

It was not, however, his aversion to Lord Littmass, that led Noel to prefer taking his rifle and wandering along the cliffs overhanging the Bristol Channel, in search of any curious specimen he might find of bird or plant, to joining the shooting-parties in their forays on the game that stocked the covers of Linnwood Manor. His position as a resident in that neighbourhood prevented his being considered merely as a guest of the Bevans, and enabled him to exercise his independence without seeming discourteous; for there was always a possibility of his being called away on business connected with his own property. Of course whenever Sophia found out that he had absented himself from the party without such excuse, she was not slow to exercise her powers of generalisation upon him in regard to this peculiarity.

'If you were a sailor you would prefer a cutting-out expedition all by yourself, to fighting in line of battle. As a hunter you would prefer the backwoodsman's solitary chase to the crowded battue of India. And as a suitor you will run the chance of losing your game by scorning to use the good offices

of surrounding relatives to drive your *objet* into your snares. You will stalk your dear,' she cried, with a shout of laughter, 'and think everything is done when you have succeeded in making the poor thing in love with you; when you ought to be throwing your net over papas and mammas, and make all her belongings favourable to your suit, and so close in gradually but surely upon your prize.'

This speech was made during lunch one day, when Edmund had been out alone since early morning.

'There spake our friend's social qualities,' said Lord Littmass to the party generally. 'To be able to say "alone I did it," would be the reverse of a recommendation to her large sympathies. Miss Sophia Bevan's unselfishness would forbid her to win anything by herself, or for herself. But all the world must participate in the pleasure of the chase and the satisfaction of the capture.'

'And in the enjoyment of the prize, too?' asked Noel, with a scarcely perceptible tinge of sarcasm.

'Well, we may hope and suppose there would be some exceptions to her catholic self-denial in that respect. Though, when once the mind inclines favourably to the principle of co-operation, it is not easy to see why it should stop short of absolute communism.'

'Lord Littmass, hold your tongue!' exclaimed Sophia, with peremptory emphasis. 'And, Edmund, tell us what you have been doing since sunrise.'

'Only fighting.'

'Where and for what?' asked Miss Bevan.

'With and for whom?' asked Lord Littmass.

'Don't be alarmed. Only against the Chinese.'

'Don't be absurd, mysterious, and provoking; but do explain.'

'Merely to preserve my individuality. Are you not aware of the recent discovery that we are becoming so crowded together upon this little island, as to be in danger of having all our angles rubbed off, and becoming as like each other as so many Chinese. Preferring my own organisation to that of my neighbours, if for no other reason than that it is mine, or me, I naturally desire to confirm and develop it, instead of merging my identity in the vast whole of a redundant population.'

'If such be the effect of association,' said Sophia, 'surely it is better to become assimilated to one's own species, than to the

birds, beasts, and fishes you find about the rocks and cliffs of North Devon.'

'Why not say mermaids?' asked Noel.

'There is something human and feminine about them, and that would be enough to set you against their society.'

'Not if they are like the one I saw this morning. Golden-auburn is exactly the right colour, is it not?'

'What nonsense has taken possession of you all to-day?' asked Lady Bevan.

'Whither did your wandering genius lead you this morning, and did you really have an adventure?' asked Sophia with more interest than the occasion seemed to warrant, while Lady Bevan and Lord Littmass exchanged a hasty glance.

'I know by your writings,' said Noel to Lord Littmass, with the intention of turning the conversation, 'that you hold with Wordsworth the sentiment,

"The world is too much with us,"

and appreciate the necessity of a certain amount of solitude for self-culture, and indeed for self-respect.'

'A short experience of barrack life would cure any one of doubting it,' replied Lord Littmass. 'There are no "oaks" to be "sported" there as at the Universities. But I fancy it is not so much of Wordsworth's as of Thomson's verses that our friends are reminded by your utterance of just now. Mermaid and Musidora have the same initial, and are alike associated in the mind with bathing. A foolish association, doubtless, as we never talk of fish bathing, and mermaids are not amphibious, but wholly fishy beings.'

'I think it is your lordship who is now confounding Thomson's Seasons, his summer with our autumn,' returned Noel, concealing altogether his surprise at the direction into which the conversation was so persistently turned, a concealment which his habit of self-control made easy for him.

Sophia, however, knew him too well not to divine that he had some meaning in his mind when he alluded to such a thing as a mermaid; and with her usual precipitancy and not very unusual correctness, she jumped to the conclusion that he did not wish to be drawn out, at least, before the whole party, and so she came forward as an effectual ally to turn the general attention to some other quarter.

'Who will drive over with me to Waters'-Meet this after-

noon, and try their luck in the Lynn? We shall have two good hours for fishing; the carriages will hold eight, with appliances, and I want to pay a visit there.'

'Trout-fishing with ladies!' exclaimed Lord Littmass, with a slight and not unpardonable sneer. 'It may be true that women fall in love through the ear, but trout are not to be tickled and taken in that way. Besides, it is too damp for me under the trees at this time of year.'

'And too late in the day to go fly-fishing,' added one of the younger men; 'but I vote for making a day of it to-morrow, and taking lunch with us; that is, if the ladies will promise to wear garments of dusky hue, and reserve the sweet music of their voices till the sport be over.'

'Very good,' said Sophia, 'that is settled; but I want to go there to-day, and invite you, Edmund, to escort me.'

'Now,' she said to Noel, when settled in her place in the carriage, 'I saved you from the inquisitors whom you indiscreetly provoked at lunch. Tell me what you meant. Which way did you go this morning? I have a particular reason for asking, because if you went one way it may lead to a change in our party, and if another, it is of no consequence.'

'Well, if I was mysterious before, I am altogether surpassed by you now. And as there seems to be so much more than meets the eye, I feel disposed to keep silence until I know what it all means.'

'It is too late now,' said Sophia. 'Did you not notice the looks exchanged between mamma and his lordship when you spoke of your morning ramble?'

'I did not observe that you were implicated in them; but I agree to exchange mystery for mystery.'

'Well, as I first discovered my mystery myself, I consider it is my own, and that I violate no confidence in revealing it. Besides, I never consider that I am breaking a secret by imparting it to you.'

'It seems to me,' he said, 'that the conspirators have betrayed themselves by their notice of what might have been a merely accidental observation of mine. Why make this the occasion of disburdening your mind when you can still cherish your secret in secret?'

'Because it is too late. If you went somewhere this morning, you might go somewhere again, and that would not suit the views of somebody. I won't stop to quarrel with you for

pretending not to want to know anything I can tell you; but, say, you did not go towards the Valley of Rocks this morning, but by Porlock Cove?'

'Your clairvoyance is unerring. Pray how long has the cottage been tenanted?'

'Now, how could you find that out unless you went round by water. It was chosen for its present inhabitant chiefly on account of its utter inaccessibility. I knew the dear old spot well as a child. It is down in a little cleft between high cliffs which overhang the sea on each side, and is hidden in the rear by a dense copse; the whole being enclosed by hedges and gates at the back and the sea in front. I know that its inmates never come out of their retreat; so that if you did not go in a boat, you must have obtained access either as a sea-gull or the early milkman.'

'By your description it should be either a nunnery or a lunatic asylum. I trust that what I beheld this morning was not a symptom of either.'

'Possibly a little of both. But tell me what occurred, and then I shall know how to supplement your account.'

'Well, as you know the position so well, it needs no diagram to make my description intelligible. Deeming the place utterly deserted, I took a fancy for getting to it by climbing round the face of the cliff about half way up.'

'Oh, don't!' cried Sophia, putting her hand over her eyes. 'It makes me giddy to think of it.'

'Then it would have made you giddier had you been there. There is no path; so by dint of kicking little hollows in the side to stick my toes in, and holding on by the shrubs, I managed to climb round the jutting edge exactly as the sun was beginning to show itself red and splendid above the horizon. And there I stuck, unable to move without alarming or shocking the damsel who was disporting herself at perfect ease in the waters of the cove, never dreaming of an observer; her sole attire being the magnificent hair which shone in the glow of the red and level sun as a most glorious golden auburn. Altogether, the tall white form as it emerged radiant from the water,

"Kissed by the glowing light of morn,"

so vividly suggested the birth of a new Venus, that I longed to be the artist or poet that could adequately celebrate it.'

'Well, I am sure you seem to have watched her carefully enough,' said Sophia, half amused and half angry.

'I could not help myself. At first, seeing upon what sacred ground I was treading, I endeavoured to retreat. But it was impossible to attempt it without risking an almost certain fall down the cliff. Hampered by my rifle, my footsteps broken away, and, worst of all, the shrubs loosened by my pulling at them, it was as much as I could do to keep my place; while retreat was impossible. I debated the propriety of giving her an alarm, but I thought that would shock her delicacy, and put an end for ever to all enjoyment of her bath; and so I resolved to keep perfectly quiet until she had finished and gone away; believing that utter ignorance would be the pleasantest frame of mind for her, and that if no one knew, no one would be the worse. As for myself, I feel the better. It was Greek unconsciousness in more senses than one.'

'Poor child,' said Sophia. 'How mad I should be if such a thing happened to me.'

'Not if you did not know it,' said Noel; 'and that is the principle that I went on.'

'What became of her?'

'I was so occupied in maintaining my foothold, and, if you will believe me, so disgusted with the part I was involuntarily playing, that I did not observe the exact moment when she left the water. I just caught a glimpse of a white long-robed figure vanishing in the wood that hides the cottage, and when I felt sure of being unobserved, I climbed round the point, and stole into the copse and came back by the inland route.'

'It was she, then, as I and the others suspected.'

'She! Who?'

'Lord Littmass's ward, who wanted to take the veil.'

'I can assure her that she looks very well without one. But I did not give Lord Littmass credit for any responsibilities. And how on earth comes she to be buried in that secluded spot?'

'Lord Littmass no responsibilities! Do you really mean to say that your aversion to him is purely instinctive, and that you know nothing whatever of his domestic history?'

'Incredible as it may appear to you, it certainly is so. But I have always felt that it would not surprise me to hear anything of him; provided, of course, that it did not involve the possession of any very great amount of moral excellence. But

how long has the young lady been there, and why should she take the veil?'

'It is a long story, and I don't know all the particulars. Lord Littmass considers the credit of the family concerned in some way, and so not a word is ever said aloud on the subject, either of his ward or his son.'

'His son!'

'You sweet innocent, you never know anything about people. Yes, his son by his wife who was mamma's—I mean the present Lady Bevan's—governess. He induced her to go off with him under promise of marriage; and after nearly breaking her heart, he only married her just before their first child was born; and then only, I believe, more in order to prevent the threatened withdrawal of my father's friendship than from any sense of duty or contrition. The whole affair was kept private, and the poor lady, for lady she was, I have heard, in every respect, died, and left him only this son, whom he has brought up in ignorance of his parentage, but well educated. I believe he rarely sees him, and scarcely knows whether he loves or hates him.'

'What and where is the son now?'

'He succeeded admirably at the University, and obtained a travelling fellowship, of which, being without home or acknowledged ties of kindred, he has availed himself to the utmost, devoting himself, I believe, to botany and other scientific ursuits in the remotest regions.'

'Do you know him personally?'

'But slightly. I met him once at a party at Lord Littmass's in London, some three or four years ago. He took me down to dinner, and I was much interested in his conversation; for he seemed to ignore both himself and me as human members of society, and to be simply an intellect, unconscious of, or indifferent to, all personal relations in time or space; probably because he never had any. For once in my life I was an almost silent listener, making only an occasional suggestion, in order, by the exhibition of a sympathy imperceptible to him, to lead him on to talk. With all his talent, he gave me the impression of being a most unpractical man in the little essentials of life. The bow of his necktie was anywhere but where it should have been; his coat had been hustled on with the collar tucked all awry; and he allowed that he was often nearly starved merely through forgetting to eat. His whole

look and manner, showed that he had never known womanly care or association. An enterprising wife would find a fine field for her energies in civilising James Maynard.'

'James Maynard, Lord Littmass's son!'

'Yes, but he does not know it. He has grown up in the belief that he is an orphan, and that Lord Littmass is his benefactor.'

'James Maynard of St Catherine's, Oxford?'

'Yes; do you know him?'

'A man of middle height, wiry figure, straight dark hair which he wears rather long, and altogether giving one the idea of perpetual unrest?'

'That is his picture exactly. Do you know him personally?'

'I know of him. His rooms were one of the sights of the University. He was quite unconscious of it himself, but it was the usual thing for men who had friends up to watch him go out, and then to bribe his servant to let them in. I was admitted once, and never was old curiosity shop more quaintly stored. I hardly know whether the sights or the sounds were most remarkable. As I went in the man said, "Mind the snake, sir;" and, looking up, there was a great reptile coiled round a bar just over my head, hissing furiously, but without teeth; and birds and beasts, living or stuffed, were on all sides. Baskets of rare plants, and trays of books hung alternately from the ceiling. Ranged in one corner, stood the gilded pipes of the old college organ. Multitudes of bits of huge wax candles stood on every shelf and table, anything serving for candlestick—a root or knot of an old tree, the shoulder of an old marble bust, the hand of a carved oaken saint; and each candle was surmounted by a gigantic extinguisher, made of cardboard and covered with gold, silver, or coloured paper. These were said to indicate some ancient worship, which he had the credit of wishing to revive. Then there were models of Stonehenge, the Irish round towers, and various Indian shrines and temples. It required all one's care to get through the rooms without upsetting something, or knocking one's head against the pendants, in order to get to the windows at the back, where, overlooking the college gardens, he had built a balcony, which appeared altogether insecure, but was most picturesquely provided with a divan. This was his favourite lounge, where, surrounded by birds, flowers, and fountains of his own construction, he used to lie and either read or doze,—for it was said that he never went to

'Well, do as you think best, only be careful. Lady Bevan is gentle and nervous, and Lord Littmass may be dangerous, and you are impetuous; and I am meditating an early start for London to-morrow.'

'What, running away from the scene of action?'

'The emergency is this: I undertook to write a paper for one of the Quarterlies, and the editor has written to say that up to a very recent date my article was unimpeachable, but that some new information has come out which I must consult before my paper is put into type. And the time is so short, that he advises me to come to London about it at once. I shall have to stop on the road, so that really I have no choice.'

'I shall be sorry to lose you; but go by all means. I didn't know you had any connection in that quarter. You never told me a word about your writing when I have been scolding you for not writing.'

'I have done so little in that way yet, that perhaps I felt I deserved your reproaches; and I hate cackling over my eggs, especially when they are only experimental ones. I like to appear before my friends as a full-blown author, and not as a student merely. What else is power or grace but concealment of method? I prefer sweeping away my chips before exhibiting my work.'

'I remember how clean and tidy your studio was when I had the honour of admission to see your bust of Undine. And I was disappointed at being received as a stranger, and not finding you in your shirt-sleeves, and treading on bits of marble.'

'Just as, when you dine out, the first thing you do is to rush into the kitchen and see how the dinner is being cooked.'

'I don't do anything of the kind, sir. I care more how the company is dressed than the food. I am so glad, however, to find that you are writing something, that I won't quarrel with you at present. It was always your fancy to gather your experience in private, and appear as a proficient all at once. Do you remember when my father resuscitated the forgotten game which used to be called "the devil on two sticks," but which we called "whizzgig," how we were all toiling to discover the secret of playing it, and you wouldn't touch it until you suddenly took it up one day and astonished papa himself, who said he had never seen it played better; and all the time you had been shutting yourself up and practising it in private?

You seem to go on the same principle now, and I shall not be surprised any day to see you come out in some character which involves an experience your friends have little idea you possess —perhaps an awfully wicked one. Even now you may be a regular Don Giovanni for aught I can tell.'

'Yes; happily we are not transparent for our thoughts to shine out through us. There is a possibility of concealing one's bad side. It is a great blessing to be able to bury our dead past out of the sight of our friends, if not out of our own. But tell me, do you not practise your songs in private before singing them to your friends?'

'Scarcely. I just glance at them when they first come, to get an idea of their meaning. Little more.'

'You do that by an intense though momentary concentration, which you can perhaps exercise in the presence of others, the question being one of interpretation only. Were it one of creation, as with most artist work, I suspect you would be more retiring when the faculty had to be exercised.'

'I don't know. I never could create anything. I can only criticise what others do. I have no invention; and if I had I believe it would be just the same.' And then, tickled by some fancy, she went off into an explosion of laughter, which kept breaking out again on every attempt to renew the conversation, until they were nearly home.

On entering the Manor House, Sophia found Lady Bevan watching for her with a somewhat uneasy aspect. Taking her aside, she told her that Lord Littmass had been suddenly called away to London, and might not return for some time; and that she proposed to pass the evening in her room, and would be glad if Sophia would come in for half an hour in the evening. Noel then advanced, and thanking Lady Bevan for her hospitality, said he would take that opportunity of bidding her good-bye, as he was going to start early for London. With a glance toward Sophia, Lady Bevan asked him when this resolution was made.

'On the receipt of my letters yesterday.'

'I wish you could give us at least another day. It will be a great blow to lose our two principal gentlemen at once. Can you not manage it?'

'I shall be only too glad to stay if I can be of any use,' said Noel. 'Not that I feel myself essential to your comfort, even in the absence of Lord Littmass,' he added, laughing.

'I depend upon you, then, for to-morrow at least,' said Lady Bevan, retiring.

CHAPTER V.

James Maynard and Margaret Waring were wards of Lord Littmass, though not by virtue of Chancery. When children they had constantly met in his house in Mayfair, during the boy's holidays. James, who was some seven years the elder, had from the first been awed and attracted by the weird calmness and spiritual transparency of Margaret's nature. To his wayward, fitful disposition, recognising no heaven save one that must be taken by storm, this child's quiet grace was as a new Apocalypse; but he scarcely became conscious of the effect she had produced on him until he met her unexpectedly, when, in her fifteenth year, she was sojourning at Heidelberg with an unmarried elder sister of her guardian, who had been taken ill there on her way to Rome. Lady Primavera, or, as she was familiarly styled among her acquaintances, Lady Prim, no sooner learnt that the child had found an old friend and playmate with whom she roamed about the old ruins, and admired the rich autumnal tints of the woods that reached far away over the hill-tops, and that this old friend was James Maynard, than she at once, and as if by an effort of her will, got well enough to continue her journey. This resolution was precipitated by the demonstrative conduct of certain students of the University of Heidelberg. Poor Margaret, who was tall for her age, had quite unconsciously excited the fierce admiration of several of these ardent Teuton youths. Two parties, each alike intending to serenade her, met one evening under her window; but from songs they proceeded to blows, several were wounded, and the disturbance was so serious that the Burgomaster called next morning, to explain the cause of it to Lady Prim, and to apologise on behalf of the town.

Endowed with such a keen appreciation of the 'improper' as to be in the habit of denouncing the most innocent romps of children as 'bold and dangerous familiarities,' whenever the party consisted of both sexes, Lady Prim took fire at the equi-

vocal position of her charge, and began to look upon Margaret as a firebrand, dangerous alike to herself and others; and so, suddenly left Heidelberg for her winter's destination.

Born in Florence while her father held the Embassy there, christened by an Italian name, and decidedly more Catholic than Protestant at heart, she looked to Rome as her ultimate residence, and now hastened thither with the child whom her brother had committed to her charge, and a favourite old servant of the family, who had known Margaret's mother, and had tended Margaret herself from infancy.

Not for herself only was Lady Prim anxious to reach Rome. There was a vague notion in her mind that the circumstances attending Margaret's birth were somehow such as required to be in some way remedied by priestly contact, and that a journey to Rome was a sort of pilgrimage, the performance of which exercised a healthy and retrospective influence. Decided as were this good lady's ideas of duty, her perceptions of fact were very dim. Her brother's ascendancy over her was complete. He had left her in doubt about Margaret's real history, intimating that it was not a subject for her to enter upon; and she ever after rigidly abstained from inquiry or conjecture, believing that if it were 'proper' for her to know it she would have known it. She was not aware that her ignorance was not shared by nurse Partridge, for her character was one that prohibited indulgence in anything approaching to familiar conversation with servants; and the dame looked upon herself as belonging to Lord Littmass rather than to his sister, and to Margaret more than to either. While serving Lady Prim she did not love her; and she had no promptings, either from within or from without, to disclose to her aught that she knew.

In short, the dame was a good creature, who understood young people, though somewhat puzzled by Margaret whom she dearly loved; and she resented the prudery that would chill young lives with gloom and distrust. She was a great ally, also, of James Maynard; and if she had any suspicions of his parentage, she kept them so entirely to herself, that even Lord Littmass was in doubt whether she knew or not. It was under her kindly eye that they had explored the wild glens of the Neckar; and it was owing to the contagion of her reticence, rather than to any conscious caution, that Margaret adopted the same habit of silence as to her outdoor companionship.

Such reserve, indeed, was but part of Margaret's character,

and it well became her. It was in perfect harmony with the wondering, dreamy look that was habitual to her; a look that seemed to imply that she was but a new arrival in the world from some other state of existence, and had not yet learnt to understand its ways, or become accustomed to the things about her. When now and then a gleam of sudden appreciation lighted up her eyes, as James Maynard described to her the organism of some flower, or explained the significance of some legend, painting, or statue, he started at its wondrous suggestiveness of a double existence of which the old was but slowly giving place to the new,—so slowly, indeed, that he sometimes doubted if the angel would ever quite yield to the woman. On the occasion of Lady Prim's sudden alarm, she vanished from Heidelberg, without an opportunity of bidding farewell to James. His first impulse was to follow at once in her supposed track; but he reflected. His vacation was just over. His duties at Oxford were about to recommence, and she had told him that Rome was to be her destination for the winter. 'Perhaps,' said he to himself, 'I shall find my way thither at Christmas.' Christmas came, and with it duties which he could not conscientiously evade. The Easter vacation brought him no liberty, and was, moreover, too short to see Rome satisfactorily. The long summer vacation gave him a scientific commission to South America. And so winter came round again before he could carry out his old intention of visiting Rome. Then he went, thinking but little of his child friend, and much of the place he was going to see.

He had paid his annual visit to Lord Littmass, and found him in mourning for his sister, Lady Prim, who had died of heart disease accelerated by starvation during the previous Lent; for, under the spiritual manipulation of the priests, she had followed her native bent and become very devout.

'It is the weak point of our family,' said Lord Littmass, when imparting this information to Maynard; 'the heart weakness, I mean, not the devoutness; and it has the advantage of saving doctors' bills, and the discomfort of a long illness; while its disadvantages may be postponed indefinitely by care.'

But he said nothing of Margaret and her nurse, and Maynard did not venture any inquiry. Perhaps it did not occur to him to do so, the information being vouchsafed in reference only to Lord Littmass's garb. So to Rome went James Maynard, with a whole month in which to explore its glories, and no

thought of any personal interests or engrossments to distract his attention.

CHAPTER VI.

A MEMORABLE era is it in the life of a young Englishman of high intellect and culture when he first enters the gates of Rome. The whole of his associations belong to the past. Memories of the old Christian and older Pagan systems throng upon his mind. The existence of a Present or a Future, which in the modern world thrusts itself at every moment upon the attention, does not there occur to him. He seems to be in a dream which has no relation to his waking life. James Maynard found nothing incongruous with his preconceived ideas. Regarding Christian Rome as the flower and fruit of the best of the ancient Paganisms, he yet was not disappointed at seeing no signs of a vitality that promised to yield a seed for future growth. He was at once antiquarian enough to enjoy the contemplation of the past, and humanitarian enough to rejoice in man's gradual emancipation from the trammels of a terrifying mystery, and his transference to the regime of positive science. Accustomed to view the world's past, present, and future as connected parts of a continuous whole, and with Hobbes, Pascal, and Comte, to regard the generations of men as one man always living and incessantly learning, he was able to discern ample resemblance between the oldest and newest phases of faith and practice to establish their real identity of origin and character.

Wandering through modern church and ancient temple, witnessing the ceremonies of the one, recalling the rites of the other, and comparing the fundamental doctrines of both, Maynard found himself exulting in the reflection that the grand old systems of India, Egypt, Greece, and Rome are not dead, but through their alliance with the old Hebraism still survive, like parents in their offspring, transmitting the same lineaments and characteristics from the earliest historical periods to the present.

'All alike, all alike,' he muttered to himself, when watching one day a grand religious ceremonial in St Peter's, with pope,

and cardinals, and priests officiating, and the multitude adoring around. 'Mankind is everywhere divided into two classes, the priesthood and the people. Persuasion may be better than force, but here the rulers have both. It was a great idea to govern men by means of their ignorance. Ignorance, Veneration, Fear, a whole trinity of fetters ready made to the rulers' hands, and warranted to outlast the ages. Luther but half did his work. He knew more than he dared to say. Had his successors but gone back upon their basis of operations, instead of attempting to advance beyond it, mankind would have been spared the waste of centuries. Luther saved Rome. Are men for ever to go wrong when they seek to construct? Is man's sole function that of analysis? As it is, the Reformation has given us a scarcely refined Hebraism instead of the scarcely refined Paganism that prevails here. Had it but substituted the Greek for the ascetic and Judaic element, it would have proved the resuscitator of Art and Beauty, and the parent of Science in modern life, and by its encouragement of real knowledge have proved the interpreter and minister of Nature. The Roman understands, and is silent. The Protestant is ignorant, and argues. How must the Initiated laugh in their sleeves, as they see the vain wanderings of blind leading or following blind! No wonder they are so irreconcilably hostile. The conflict, which began thousands of years ago, has become more bitter as its origin has been forgotten. Yes, since the day when it first occurred to man to make God in his own image, has the feud existed. Cain and Abel, Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic, under whatever name, the quarrel is one, and will last till——no, not for ever, surely, if man continue his progress, however slowly. But the Eternal must be very patient!'

The bent of James Maynard's mind and the character of his philosophy being indicated by these reflections, it is little wonder that he soon withdrew alike from church and temple, and devoted himself to the galleries, where the contemplation of Greek art in its ineffable calmness soon won him to be its exclusive votary. Deeply imbued with the Greek philosophy, he possessed much of the Greek unconsciousness. Yet his analysis of things external to himself was at once sympathetically searching, and pitilessly keen as that of an arch-inquisitor.

The tenderer mood soon became that in which he viewed all things in Rome, for it was the mood evoked by the softening

influence of Margaret Waring, whom he found one day sitting in the Vatican, intent on the countenance of the Apollo Belvedere, as if determined to read his inmost character. Her good nurse was busily knitting by her side, for though she always humoured and accompanied her young mistress, she did not care about looking at the 'figures' herself.

'A human god, a human god,' murmured Margaret, more to herself than to her companion.

'And, pray, what else would you have?' asked Maynard rather sharply, turning to the speaker without having before observed her.

'Mr Maynard!' exclaimed Margaret in a voice of delight. 'I am so glad, and you can explain so much to me. I half fancied you would have come last winter.'

'And have you been in Rome ever since we parted at Heidelberg?' he asked, shaking hands eagerly with them both. 'It is for me then to learn of you. I am but a new comer, and have already felt the need of some fairy to conduct me through this wonder-land.'

'Ah, I think our positions will be the same as of old. I can tell you where everything is, but I want the key to open them when I get to them.'

'And are you and the dame taking care of each other in Rome?'

'Oh yes, it is so delightfully free. One has only to be an artist, or pretend to be one, to have all the privilege of age or manhood.'

'Then the vacancy made by poor Lady Prim's death did not require filling?'

'No; nurse goes everywhere with me. But now you are come she will be only too well pleased to stay at home, if you are serious in wishing me to be your guide to Rome.'

They were both standing before the Apollo while thus conversing, Margaret self-possessed and quite unaware that under the fostering sun of Italy she had made considerable progress in growing into a tall and lovely young woman during the interval since they had last met, and glad with a sister's gladness at seeing her friend and patron once more; and James at first delighted at the improvement which had taken place in her, and at the heartiness of her greeting, and then half disappointed at the absence of all shyness or embarrassment in her manner.

'It is to be service for service then?' he answered; 'you

will guide me to the exteriors of things, and I am to do my best to lead you to their interior significance. Your feminine instinct is very apt to render such help superfluous, but I shall not decline the office. Tell me, what did you mean by your exclamation of regret just now?'

'I did not mean to be overheard,' replied Margaret, turning crimson at the idea of having revealed her secret thought; 'but I was wondering whether the ancients ever longed for the knowledge of some Being who was superior to man's weakness and yet could sympathise with man in his weakness.'

'And what answer did Apollo vouchsafe?'

'The scornful triumph of his face tells me that he is but a man, self-centred, and subject to comparisons.'

'Yet surely a divine man in his immeasurable superiority,' returned Maynard. 'Were the human element absent, how could the divine be represented at all? Unhuman, it would be merely animal, or an unintelligible monstrosity and representative of nothing to our imaginations. Were the capacity for love and for hate absent from the expression of that face, how could he sympathise with man in his strongest feelings? Is not the scorn of evil there written, mingled with the triumph of its overthrow?'

'Not for me,' said Margaret firmly. 'His love is self-love. He can triumph in the easy victory of the destruction he has dealt, but not in winning his enemies to be his friends. His is the love that a slight would turn into hate, for, if he loves, it is for his own sake. His devotion is to his own glory. A beautiful self-seeker is Apollo.'

Thus thought Margaret aloud, forgetting, in the intensity of her abstraction, the existence of all hearers. Maynard recalled her to herself by exclaiming,

'Your heart has divined the truth. Devotion, self-sacrifice for the good of others—in vain you seek these in the Olympian god. To you is vouchsafed the later revelation, for you have discerned its significance. You have made Apollo testify to the superior divinity of Humanity. Henceforth you shall guide me.'

'Nay,' said Margaret, smiling and rising from the bench on which they had been seated during the discussion. 'I have been here many times, but never, until you came, did I see that the Apollo is a symbol of an older and inferior faith, a faith which recognised only the beauty of *being*.'

'Which, of all the marbles, is your favourite here?' asked Maynard, as they passed into the court of the Laocöon.

'I scarcely know. They seem to vary with my mood. Sometimes I am so riveted by the agony of this poor father, that I can neither stay nor tear myself away.'

'Why of the father only? the boys are terrified enough, surely.'

'Yes; but only on their own account. He suffers for them even more than for himself.'

'You are right,' said Maynard. 'Accustomed to his protection, they do not yet despair, for he is with them. They have not yet learnt the powerlessness to aid them, the consciousness of which gives all its intensity to his agony. Your insight is correct again. His greatest suffering is for others. What anguish can be bitterer than that of the father who feels that they must look to him in vain; they, the children, to succour whom has ever been his supreme delight? Thus, the most human is the most divine. The Greeks knew it, and made their men better than their deities.'

But Margaret seemed to hear him not, so intent was she on the old man's countenance. At last she suddenly turned away, saying,—

'I cannot bear it; let us go.'

Entering the cabinet tenanted by Canova's 'Perseus' and 'Pugilists,' Maynard inquired of Margaret why she did not follow.

'I hate that court,' she said, 'for it is to me the abode of the spirit of evil. I always shudder as I pass it.'

'Why, is not this Perseus fair and harmless enough?'

'A harmless hero, truly,' she returned, with a tinge of sarcasm in her tone, which indicated to James a side of her nature the existence of which he had not before suspected 'Canova has made evil strong, and goodness feeble and foolish.'

'That crouching Pugilist is certainly one of the most horrid creatures ever done into marble,' said James, 'but the other is a noble young fellow enough, and worthy a better fate; and—yes, yes, you are quite right—that is not the Perseus who cut off the Medusa's head. He is a youth posing for the part: a *petit maître* and no hero.'

'Oh, thank you,' cried Margaret, 'that is exactly what I wanted.'

Thus they continued conversing and discussing the marvels of art around them, indulging in that sort of criticism which is

often doubly interesting in that it is as much an index to the character of the critic as to that of the thing criticised, until the dame came to remind Margaret that it was time to go home for her painting lesson. Maynard accompanied her to the foot of their staircase, and made an appointment for the next day. They talked as they went of Margaret's pursuits, and agreed in placing Sculpture above Painting, inasmuch as form is more than colour; and she expressed her regret that the time, labour, and numerous appliances requisite for sculpture made it impossible for her to practise it. Feeling the artist-soul within her striving for expression, Margaret, as doubtless many others have done, longed for such facilities as would be afforded by the establishment of a general studio whither she could repair to execute her own work, or where she could have her models of clay transferred to imperishable marble by hands more fitted for the toil.

'Thus only,' she said to Maynard, 'can the fair visions of many an artist, rich to imagine, but feeble to execute, ever find an opportunity of expression. If artists would but co-operate in that way, how much richer in eternal forms of beauty the world would be.'

For want of such aid she devoted herself to painting and music; and never was she so perfectly happy as when joining in the devotional harmonies of the nuns in the convent chapel which adjoined her lodging.

It was in this way that James and Margaret met, and talked, and beheld, and he unconsciously fell in with her mood, and attuned his own stores of scholastic knowledge and original reflection to her deeply devotional and pure artistic spirit. In presence of the calm and holy life she followed in the pursuit and worship of the highest beauty, he forgot for a time his waywardness and fitfulness. With her by his side he paused to examine reverently objects which he had before deemed but worthy of a hasty glance, and, not taking in all their significance, had given up as exaggerated in their renown. Thus, entering St Peter's one day, he remarked that he was disappointed in its size.

'Come and sit under the dome, and do not think about it,' said Margaret to him, 'that is the only way to realise its vastness. The sense will steal gradually upon you. One seems to imbibe it as the flowers do the light, without effort on one's own part.'

'The flowers, by their subtle chemistry, turn the light into colour,' he said, laughing, 'much as you do who excel so in colour in your painting, and yet wear only black and white yourself. You see, I have been talking to your master, and learnt your good and bad points. He never had so promising a pupil, he tells me, for colour; but he would almost despair of your drawing correctly were you of a less painstaking disposition. And yet you agree with me in ranking Form above Colour.'

'Perhaps it is because I feel my own deficiency,' she answered; 'yet I always find that I prefer an engraving or photograph of a good painting to the painting itself.'

'I think I know the reason of that,' said Maynard. 'It is because the drawing is better than the colouring, even with the best masters. I, too, prefer a picture in light and shade to a coloured one, possibly because the imagination supplies the tints better than the artist can do it. Your master says that your sense of harmony in colour, is one of the finest he ever knew. This may account for your being easily dissatisfied.'

'I fear it is the same with me in music,' she said, 'for it makes me so painfully fastidious. Nurse says she always despaired of getting any clothes to suit me, I was so hard to please about the colours. It was a vast relief to her when I declared that in future I would wear nothing but black and white. She tells me I shall have a terrible time of it, if ever I go into the world, being so conscious of a jar. Now look round, and see if the building has not grown upon you while sitting quietly here, so as to impress you far more with a sense of its grandeur than if you had been running about from one part to another, and trying to see it all in a little time. It always seems to come to me as I sit still and muse.'

'It is more my way,' said Maynard, 'to hunt down what I want, than to sit with folded hands and wait patiently for it to come to me. And that I take to be the main distinction between the masculine and feminine elements in nature.'

'Can this glorious building ever perish like the rest?' exclaimed Margaret suddenly. 'Yesterday, while at the Baths and Coliseum, your description of the games and recreations of old, brought the busy, crowded scenes before me so visibly, that ancient Rome began to live again. But even their mighty strength and massiveness failed to preserve them. Surely it is that in Christianity we have a condition of indestructibility.

It cannot perish like the old faiths. Its triumphs are eternal as its truth. Yet you used the phrase "later revelation" in the Vatican, as if one revelation had already given way to another. And if so, why not this? The thought of such perpetual unrest is so saddening, as if the world were to be always striving, never attaining.'

'You are too young yet, surely, to feel the weariness of the pursuit,' returned Maynard. 'The hopefulness that springs for ever in the youthful breast will keep you for a long time yet from fainting by the way.'

'I am not so sure of that,' returned Margaret. "'I am not situated like other girls. I have hardly ever known any of my own age. Life is a complete mystery to me; and I think, sometimes, that I should like to retire altogether into some peaceful convent, if only for the sake of sociability. I often talk with the nuns here, and amid their good works and cheerful devotions they seem to live happily enough. They tell me that I could join them and still work at my painting and music.'

Her companion did not immediately speak after Margaret had thus given utterance to what were evidently her inmost feelings. His ready and subtle penetration enabled him to perceive that the confidence had been unwittingly drawn from her by the place and the circumstances, and that she would have shrunk from exposing her sense of the isolation of her existence had she been made aware by any remark of his that she had done so. Being so much by herself she had acquired a habit of communing with herself, and, so, frequently expressed aloud feelings which she would not have revealed to anybody. Maynard perceived this, and often forbore to take direct notice of her utterances. He preferred dealing with them without letting her suspect that she had herself prompted him.

The rare faculty of sympathetic insight with which he was endowed, a faculty which is capable of being as great a curse as blessing to its possessor, always impelled him to effect the changes which he deemed desirable in any one's opinions or feelings, by the exhibition of the opposite view in a favourable light, without any palpable or obtrusive antagonism. His plan in dealing with transgressors was ever to exhibit the right instead of denouncing the wrong; and with the sorrowing to dissipate sadness by the presentment of cheerfulness. The contrast of his own life and habits would, he believed, best counteract in the present case, the growth of feelings which he

considered to be unhealthy in themselves, and which in some way, as yet undefined in his mind, seemed to darken, by anticipation, his own future life.

Not that Maynard had any day dreams even about his own future. The position of a fellow of a college, to whom a moderate ease and competence are assured on the almost sole condition of abstinence from marriage, is not one to encourage other than purely intellectual ambitions. Should such an one become possessed by a desire to quit his celibate condition, his sole resource whereby he can retain his livelihood, is by taking orders or accepting a college living. James Maynard was one of the many who had strained a point so far as to take his degree in order to obtain his fellowship, but he would not take orders, or commit himself to a charge of souls. A passive assent to the dogmas of the church might be given once for all, but a lifelong call to inculcate them was quite another matter. Unless, indeed, Love should come in to dissolve the scruples which nourished celibacy. Such a solution Maynard, though he had witnessed it in others, had never deemed possible for himself. With a passion for freedom both in habit and in opinion, he could not brook the idea of being bound to any one locality or phase of life and thought. He had therefore gladly availed himself of that charming form of endowment called a travelling fellowship, which he could hold for a term of years untrammelled by any irksome conditions; and henceforth he considered himself vowed to celibacy. His peculiar circumstances and organisation prevented him from regarding such a destiny as one that involved any hardship. Of domestic life he was absolutely ignorant. His habit of body was austerely ascetic, and that of his mind lay far away from wedded possibilities. So that, while enacting the part of friend and elder brother to Margaret at this time, it was by no means with the idea of forming her to be the fate of his future life; and this, rather because the future gave him no concern whatever, than because such an idea would have been repugnant to him had it been possible for him to entertain it.

CHAPTER VII.

At length, breaking in upon the reverie in which Margaret was lost, Maynard said,—

'It is curious to mark the numberless phases of life through which we may pass, and yet all the time retain our own identity of being and character. I quite feel with you the influence of this place, and recognise its idea as an eternal and luminous crystal of religion. Yet, as I sit here under the noblest of man-made domes, I am not so altogether dominated by it but that I can, in imagination, wander away into the wild open far-off countries, where I have lived for months together with no dome above me but that of heaven, and nought but living nature around me. There, as a humble student of nature, knowing something of botany, of geology, of astronomy, of history, I have found it impossible to believe in the eternity of forms. Whether it be plant or animal, man or mountain, yea, or the great globe itself, all show themselves subject to change. Conditions ever control being, and conditions are by no means a monotonous repetition of themselves. Man's purpose in art is even less to imitate nature than to perpetuate an imitation of it in an enduring form. It is true that life is one, but its manifestations must change with its conditions. Thus, immutability is no proof of vitality. In every department of nature, in the operations of the mind, in manners, in life national, social, or individual, crystallisation is death. History does not exempt even Faith from the general law. The instant any party or person claims the finality of infallibility, his doom is indicated. He ceases to be in harmony with his surrounding conditions. I love to rejoice in the beauty and fitness of things as they spring up in harmony with the world. The conviction of their transitoriness rather enhances their beauty in my sight, and impels me to wonder by what new variety of beauty they will be succeeded.'

'When you used the phrase "later revelation,"' said Margaret, 'I did not quite understand its connection with what we were talking about. It seemed as if you regarded the older religions as an earlier revelation. Did you mean that there was in them anything divinely communicated?'

'Do you remember,' asked Maynard in return, 'how indig-

nant you were as we roamed over the Coliseum and the Baths of Caracalla, at the wanton destruction of those magnificent edifices? Yet half modern Rome is built, not only on the very site, but with the very materials of the ancient city. It is the same with its religion. It has laid all previous religions under contribution as, of old, Imperial Rome laid the rest of the world. And much of what exists here now, will form part of that which will supersede it. Catholicism retains much from Paganism. The Reformation retains much from Catholicism; and that which the Reformation contains most fitted to survive, will survive, and become part of man's future inheritance. If it be only a protest in favour of free inquiry and free expression, it will be much.'

'I am not sure now,' said Margaret, 'that I find any answer to my question, which referred to divine revelation, and not to human ideas.'

'The origin of ideas,' replied James, 'is a very old problem, and one not quite settled yet. The old philosophy and the new are at issue on an essential point. Where the Hebrews thought that if a thing was of God it would stand for ever, our observers of facts say that, wherever it comes from, it will live only so long as the laws of its being fit it to live; and so they find an ever-changing natural selection to be the divinely established order of things, instead of a hard rigid rule of invariability. We must not assume a system to be exclusively divine merely because it seems to harmonise with our own individual mood and habit. Probably I cannot better illustrate my meaning than by yourself,' he continued, laughing. 'Perhaps you don't know that your name indicates you a scion of the ancient race of the Varinghians, or Varini, as Tacitus calls them; and the hypothesis receives confirmation from your type and colouring. Starting from no one knows where, spreading, by force of their energy and intelligence, over nearly all Europe from the North Cape to the Mediterranean, the Warings were once a large family, surpassing all the other Scandinavian races together in the extent of the country they dominated. But they gradually became subdivided, and merged in races which had either been subordinate to them, or which rose in energy as they subsided, until now their vestiges are to be found only in names such as that of the "Waring-Sea," which only a thousand years ago the Baltic was called, the "Varanger Fiord," and others beginning with War Var, or Wer, of which you will

find numbers in your maps of England and Germany; and in a certain type of humanity which I venture to think finds a not unworthy representative in yourself.'

'I never heard so much of my ancestors before,' said Margaret. 'I always felt as if I belonged to nobody. I shall feel more at home in the world now. I hope they were a noble race.'

'They were indeed; such great warriors as to suggest the idea that the word War came from them, and distinguished by a remarkable faculty for governing others in such a way as to make others like being governed by them. They, or their immediate kindred, made themselves very much at home here in Rome, long before you followed their example.'

'And what argument were you going to draw from my family?'

'I was about to say that a religion, like a race, starts from a single germ or idea, and undergoing accretion or growth, conquers, destroys, and supersedes, or modifies, adapts, and appropriates other religions; and, after its culmination, duly decays, and gives place in turn to something new; yet leaving, perchance, like your own race, one fair idea to bless the ages to come.'

Thanks,' said Margaret, smiling, 'that is very pretty, but is not the idea a very sad one?'

'Who shall say,' resumed Maynard, 'how far the same history is enacted by religions, countries, races, planets, and even solar systems themselves? All may dissolve and leave, I will not say, "not a wrack behind,"—there I differ from the poet; I disbelieve in the destructibility of anything, of even a thought; force may be transferred, never destroyed;—but leave a germ, idea, or cell of greater capacity than had before been possible, as a worthy result of the whole previous universe of being. In the mean time, the grand moral duty of all things is clear: "increase and multiply;" "work while it is day."'

'It seems to me as if you took pleasure in contemplating the passing away of everything that man has been accustomed to love and venerate.'

'Only in so far as it gives place to something better, or better suited to him. I cannot conceive a time when the hills will cease to wear away under the influence of sun and rain, the valleys to fill up, the ocean to fret the shores, and the rivers to carry their sediment to the sea. Yet I do not believe in a dead level ever being reached in the world physical or the world

mental, for thus there would some day be an end to the possibilities of a higher life than that of the marsh monsters. All that now exists would change and degenerate into, or at least give place to, those lower forms, which are best fitted to thrive under such conditions. Such retrogression, indeed, occurs in places, and is a necessary corollary to the idea of advance and development. Whether the change be towards a higher and more complex, or a lower and more simple, organisation, the first to dwindle and perish will be that which has the smallest faculty of adaptation to the new conditions.

'Man has a faculty beyond that of all other creatures, for modifying the conditions under which he lives. His circumstances, political and social, are for the most part of his own permission. Too often his ignorance and incompetence induce him to accept in modification of his difficulties solutions which involve fatal errors. But these are but a condition of his retrogression. Thus in this very land the fear of over-population has led to myriads of men and women turning monks and nuns. Whereas, under a healthy spirit of enterprise they might be actual producers of wealth, instead of mere useless consumers; and be leading lives really virtuous in the education of happy families.'

'What! is that the motive of the religious houses? I thought it was that they might be free to worship God.'

'They are little else than gigantic poor-houses,' returned Maynard; 'though the superstitious fears of their inmates have been played upon to make them think they have a better chance of saving their souls by shirking the duties or, as they deem them, the snares of life, than by serving God as useful citizens with active brains, busy hands, and loving hearts. There is only one rule for judging of all these things,' he added, seeing that he had succeeded in producing in his companion's mind the disturbance which he desired. 'If I want to ascertain whether any principle or practice be right, I look to its fitness for aiding humanity on the path towards such perfectibility as it is capable of. So long only as it coincides with the requirements of the most advanced reason and utility, does it show itself to be intended by God to stand. There is no standard for man out of man.'

'You judge everything by the standard of the future. What becomes of the "good old paths" then?'

'It is not the really old, but the intermediate that I am

decrying, when the promptings of Nature and Truth were superseded through the selfish artifices of those who wanted to exercise power over their fellows.'

'I cannot accept your explanation of monasticism, and I do not wish to,' said Margaret, with animation. 'You seem to reverse everything, so that things appear to me as if I saw them with my head downwards. See how curiously yonder priests eye us, sitting here so long. Had we not better go now?

As they were passing towards the great entrance, Maynard said, 'Perhaps their instincts enable them to scent heresy from afar, for doubtless they would not recognise my ideas as quite orthodox; although if everything had been unchangeable Rome and its system would never have had existence. But you are right about monasticism. I gave but the church-statesman's reasons for encouraging celibacy, and not the devotee's motives for practising it. But I can hardly bring myself to do them justice. Humanity has so little place in the consideration of monks and nuns, except as a thing to be repudiated; and I am almost a Greek in my love of it. It is Greek and not ecclesiastical Rome that has won my love. The Greek in her crumbling temples, the Greek in the sculptures of her galleries, for me, outweigh all the rest. The Greek was the real half-way house between the primitive world and the future. Nearly all that was good in the Latin was derived from it, just as all the best sculptures in Rome are either by Greek artists or imitated from the Greek; and even now, in order to attain excellence, it is necessary to follow them. Their language, their literature, their legends, still dominate the Western world, and will do so yet more when what is called Latin Christianity shall have vanished from its place in men's minds, and the old original gospel of humanity will shine out unobscured by the clumsy figments of the West. But I am always forgetting that I am talking to a young lady of seventeen. The fact is, you make so good a listener that you encourage me to run on as if you were not here at all. What a quantity of unintelligible stuff I have been talking to you.'

'Oh, I don't at all expect to understand everything at first. It is so new to me to have any interpreter beside my own fancies. I don't know whether you intended it, but you have made *il Duomo* look less to me than it did before, and I cannot tell whether it is by a darkening or an enlightening process.'

'A little of both, probably,' said Maynard, laughing, as they

went out into the piazza. 'A sudden influx of light has at first much the same effect as its withdrawal; we must get accustomed to it. The dawn of new knowledge must ever be gradual.'

'I shall never hear the word dawn again,' said Margaret, 'without thinking of our visit to the Villa Borghese. I had often looked at Bernini's lovely group of Apollo and Daphne without in the least understanding it, until your remark, "and so the sunshine ever follows the dawn," revealed the hidden meaning; and then I saw the dawn growing into day, and the earth breaking into flowers before the advancing sun-god.'

'The various aspects of Apollo,' observed Maynard, 'well illustrate the various effects of the sun's force. In your once favourite Belvedere, you see him merciless in his severity, capable of inflicting deadly sunstrokes, and blasting the produce of the earth. But with the Daphne he has all the tenderness and beneficence of a genial season.'

'But did the Greeks themselves rationalise their myths in this way?' asked Margaret.

'Some of their thinkers did, as you will, I hope, some day learn from Plato. But it is through the labours of our Oriental scholars that we have got most of our light on the subject. Here is an instance. The very word "dawn" is Sanscrit, and has the same derivation as Daphne; and they could hardly have adopted the name and the fable without comprehending their meaning.* I was referring to the eastern element in the Greek when I spoke of it as the half-way house between the old world and the new. One of the greatest defects in our knowledge which remains to be made good, is in the links which connect the various parts of the world's history. The one-sidedness that rejects the study of all except one particular view and period, is fatal to real Catholicity. I do not know whether it is through ignorance or some shallow prudential motive, that the meaning of so small a matter as the wax altar-candles is veiled from the worshipper. But for my part, if I were a Catholic, I should conceive a far greater veneration for the rites of my religion when I learnt that they are derived from a worship far more universal than Catholicism, and older than any period recorded in history.'

'Is it possible?' exclaimed Margaret.

'Yes, and true, for they belong to the earliest periods of Nature-worship, when all vivifying force as represented by the

sun was adored under the forms of the column, or the obelisk, and the flame. The former was ever the symbol of Phœbus Apollo. In the lighted candle you have a combination older than Zoroaster and the Parsees, and recognised by Abraham and the patriarchs, as part of the only really Catholic worship that ever existed or will exist.'

'You have made the religion of the place look small now, as well as its cathedral,' said Margaret, as she bade him good-bye.

Thus talking, Maynard sought to win Margaret from her tendency to a religiousness that ignored nature, to a wider appreciation of the meaning of life. He used much reserve and caution in his exhibition of the facts which he had collected in the course of his studies, for he perceived that while her high religious instinct led her to sympathise with all noble results, she would be revolted by any near view of the bare basis of things. He hoped to widen the range of her affections by showing her that in the affections all religion had its origin, and that one idea has pervaded all the modes in which man recognises and adores his Creator. He thought to arouse in her the sense of human love, and sanctify it for her by showing it to be the agency whereby the universal underlying consciousness gradually develops into the idea of God. Could Margaret once be led to regard it as but a morbid or factitious spirituality which fails to find its basis in physiological fact, she would, he thought, shrink from the life towards which she seemed to be drifting—the life of the convent. He was not conscious of having any selfish reason for his solicitude; but could not endure that the *idea* of her in his mind should be marred by association with incompleteness or failure.

Maynard's method of procedure in his attempt to open the heart of a girl may have been a strange one, but his peculiar character and education, living as he had ever done in total ignorance of all domestic association, made it natural to him. He knew of no avenue to the heart save through the intellect. Even the sense of natural affection had been so early repressed as to have died out. Any reproach to curiosity about his parentage had been so effectually rebuked by his guardian, that it had become a second nature with him to regard the subject as involving a fairly forbidden mystery.

CHAPTER VIII.

THUS during James Maynard's month in Rome he almost daily walked and talked with Margaret: not careful always to be within her comprehension so long as he knew that he was accustoming her to a larger view of things than was consistent with a total self-abandonment to the devotional spirit which had for her hitherto pervaded the place, and inspired all her art. The life of this fair girl had ever lain so far apart from intercourse with others of her own age, that the thoughtful and serious side of her nature had attained an unusual predominance. The faculty of playfulness, the cultivation of which is essential to a complete and healthy development of all the mental and physical powers, was as yet in almost total abeyance. Her nearest approaches to it had been in the companionship of Maynard, as when together they roamed gaily over the hills and vales of the Neckar, or now when her spirits became exhilarated amid the glories of the Campagna, as on their pic-nic excursion to the Grotto of Egeria, when James insisted on confounding the mythologies, regarding Margaret as Proserpine, and decking her with a profusion of the maidenhair fern which she had been gathering from the fountain consecrated to Numa's Nymph; himself with his long dark hair as gloomy Dis, and good nurse Partridge as her mother-earth Demeter. Or, again, when making a pilgrimage to the temple of Vesta, that overhangs the cataract of Tivoli, he had won from her contagious laughter, as, in compliance with the custom of the place, he ordered 'four paulsworth of waterfall' to be turned on. The dame more than once expressed to James her delight at seeing her young lady so cheerful, and said she hoped it would keep fancies out of her head, for what with always painting religious pictures and visiting churches and convents, she feared she would become too much in love with a dismal life ever to be happy like other people.

As his time drew near for returning to England, he sought to learn her exact position and intended destination in the world; but the dame either could not or would not divulge anything beyond that her guardian found it convenient to leave them in Rome since the death of his sister Lady Primavera, who had taken them there, and that she could not at all say what plans he had in store for her.

James left Rome resolving not to lose sight of Margaret, for whom he felt all of, at least, a brother's regard, and cherishing a new and grateful feeling of delight as he thought over the pleasant picture made by the group of which he had formed a member. The tall slim girl in her simple black and white dress, with her fair abundant hair escaping from beneath the shelter of her wide straw hat, and her earnest greyish-blue eyes and grave expression; the dame with her careful motherly aspect; and the contrast they must all three have made in the eyes of by-standers. He felt very grateful to the dame for the free intercourse she enabled him to have with her charge. He had half feared that she would have thought it her duty to her employer to have made difficulties, and thrown obstacles in the way of their frequent meeting. But she had no reason for so interfering to restrict their liberty. It is true that as an old retainer of Lord Littmass's, she was entirely dependent on him, but she had known both James and Margaret from infancy; she understood their characters, and, moreover, was acquainted with the secret of James's birth. And as to her master, he had given her no instructions whatever about Margaret, no hint of his intentions with regard to her, but merely told her to look after her, and see that she got some education, and to spend as little money as possible.

The peculiar position of the old woman had given her a certain indeterminateness of manner which puzzled strangers, and led them to doubt her genuineness. Aware that she knew more of Lord Littmass's affairs than he would like to know that she knew, she cultivated a habit of silence, and so escaped the risk of gossiping about his secrets. She had, moreover, heavy bitternesses of her own early life, which she was resolved to bear in silence; and the air imparted to her demeanour by these recollections, combined but inharmoniously with her real kindliness and simplicity of character. Margaret's attachment to her nurse was one of unconscious habit, though not the less complete and well-grounded. For Margaret was absorbed in a world of her own, and one into which none other intruded. Devoid of that peculiar catechetical religious training, which is considered an essential part of education in England, she was troubled by no early instilled suspicion of evil, either in herself or in others. Alike ignorant of a mother's love and of girlish friendships, she repined not at what she did not miss, and accepted her isolation as a matter of course.

Thus she had grown up as a neglected flower in a lonely waste, yet by force of her own nature imbibing and assimilating to herself all sweet energies afforded by sun and atmosphere to her heart and brain; for Nature was a mother to her, and let no heavy cloud come nigh to overshadow her young life.

CHAPTER IX.

MAYNARD returned to England to leave it again on a scientific expedition which was to occupy him far from home, for at least twelve months. During this time he heard nothing of his young friend at Rome. Margaret, after his departure, resuming the usual course of her life, at once artistic and devotional, betrayed to the watchful eye of her nurse, no evidence of change such as might be looked for in a girl after being so much in the society of a man whom she highly esteemed, and who showed her so much regard. And the good dame, while acknowledging to herself the relief it was to have no complication of her responsibilities, yet sighed as she thought of future possibilities, and said to herself,—

'I don't know if Mr James thinks of such a thing, but she certainly does not dream about a future for herself. And I doubt if she ever will. She is not one of the common sort. The society of girls of her own age is what she ought to have; and I have a great mind to let his lordship know it.'

Margaret clearly had no thought of James in any of the ordinary human capacities. Her having known him more or less all her life was against that. Familiarity may breed affection, but love is a sudden blow. She had come to regard him as a sort of meteoric friend, whose orbit brought him occasionally into contact with her sphere; and whom she always received with pleasure and parted from without regret. Had she been in the habit of analysing her relations with others, she would have discovered that the difference of their natures was so great as to make mutual sympathy in anything beyond mere intellectual respects impossible.

Several months passed after Maynard's departure from Rome before the dame finally determined to write to Lord

Littmass. Margaret's health had given way under the heats of summer, and she had in her lassitude conceived an overpowering weariness of life, and the longing to retire into a convent, to pray or to die, took irresistible hold of her. The nuns who at her entreaty came to see her, served, by their gentle kindness and apparent content with their lot, to strengthen her desire; and she prevailed on her nurse to write and ask her guardian's permission to enter a convent at least for a time. The dame would have been in despair, but for a faint hope that the reply would be a summons to return to England. To her inexpressible distress, a letter and a messenger arrived from Lord Littmass, saying that the measure had his full concurrence, and that under the advice and by the influence of an eminent Roman Catholic prelate, Miss Waring would at once enter a Carmelite Convent in the centre of France.

It was useless for the old woman to meditate opposition to this mandate. Lord Littmass had evidently sent his agent to see the step carried out; and Margaret, though greatly disappointed at being unable to stay with the friends she had already made, so longed to carry her plan into execution, that she would not hear of any delay or remonstrance. It was November when they left Rome for France, and the dame, half broken-hearted, but somewhat comforted at the kindly demeanour of the Lady Superior, took leave of Margaret at the convent door, and returned to England.

It was in the early spring that the Bishop whose influence had gained her admission, called to visit the convent. Imagining from Lord Littmass's manner that he really had his ward's good at heart, he inquired for Margaret, and was shocked at the condition to which she was reduced. Believing that he was doing a friendly act by Lord Littmass, and moved also by a feeling of humanity, he sent for an eminent medical man of the neighbourhood to consult him about her. The church was powerful in the provinces of France, whatever it might have been in the Capital. The doctor looked wistfully at her, and felt her pulse; sounded her heart, her lungs; asked her a few questions in a tone so low as not to be overheard, and then glanced toward the Bishop, who was standing and talking with the Lady Superior.

'Well, and what do you make out her complaint to be?' asked his reverence.

'I should prefer prescribing without committing myself on

that head,' answered the doctor with a look which the Bishop seemed to understand, for he at once turned to the Lady Superior, and said,—

'I will not detain you from your sacred duties longer, Sister; leave us here and we will rejoin you shortly.'

With ill-suppressed reluctance she left the cell, and the Bishop said,—

'And what do you prescribe?'

'Instant return to her home and friends.'

'No medicine?'

'Beef-steak and port wine three times a day, and air, exercise, and sleep, at discretion.'

'Why, what is her disease?'

'Have I your lordship's safeguard?'

'Most certainly.'

'She has a complication of diseases, any one of which must kill her if not arrested at once.'

'And they are—?'

'Cold, starvation, and dirt.'

The Bishop, glad to return his obligation to Lord Littmass, who had entertained him nobly when in England, took upon himself to send Margaret to the doctor's own house to be taken good care of, and wrote to tell her guardian what he had done, and to urge her immediate return home. Lord Littmass, who thought that he had got rid of her for ever, concealed his chagrin, thanked the Bishop warmly, and dispatched Dame Partridge to bring Margaret home.

They came by slow stages, halting often on the way; and when they reached England, the poor girl had made considerable progress in regaining her health and strength. Lord Littmass was absent from London, and she lived quietly at his house under the superintendence of her kind old nurse, nourished by good food, and the fresh air of the Park, with nought to disturb or retard her recovery.

CHAPTER X.

JAMES MAYNARD returned from his scientific expedition shortly after Margaret reached home. He was a man of abrupt

habits, little given to letter-writing, or to apprising others of his intentions or movements. This peculiarity, no doubt, arose from his believing that no one was interested in him or his doings. Lord Littmass was the only person to whom he ever dreamt of giving any account of himself, and he had no reason to suppose that Lord Littmass cared to hear from him, or to know of his coming, until he should actually appear before him. Consequently, when he arrived in London, it was without any intimation to his guardian that he was coming, or likely to come. Neither did Lord Littmass expect him so soon.

James, therefore, on calling at the house in Mayfair, found that his lordship was absent, and might not return for a fortnight. He found, also, that Miss Waring was in town; and learning that she had gone out to walk in Kensington Gardens, he started off to look for her.

Margaret was sitting under one of the noble chesnuts when James discovered and went up to her. The contrast between them was greater than ever. He, with skin embrowned, his dark hair long and wild, and his general bearing rugged from the wild open-air life of many months in a tropical climate. She, drooping, and paler than ever he had before seen her, yet more matured in expression, more womanly in dress, softer in tone, and less abstracted in manner. She greeted him with a glad smile that, for the moment, chased all the wanness from her face, and Maynard felt his heart leap towards her in the full strength of his manhood, with a shock of conflicting emotions among which, love, compassion, and apprehension strove for predominance.

Thinking he was going to speak, Margaret remained silent as he sat down on the bench beside her; and looking up in surprise at his silence, she perceived that he was undergoing some powerful inward struggle which for the moment made speech impossible to him. Affecting unconsciousness she gave him time to regain his composure. Presently he spoke, though with a suppressed eagerness and determination in his manner altogether new to her.

'I have just returned from South America, and have, as usual, been to pay my respects to Lord Littmass. Finding him absent, I asked if Dame Partridge was still in Rome, hoping thereby to hear of you. They sent her to me. She told me you were here. She began telling me of your history for the past year, but I hardly listened, I was so impatient to see you again. I think she said you had been very wicked, and had

gone as a nun into a convent, but I hurried off, to hear your confessions from yourself. Are you really a nun?'

'Not quite,' she replied, cheerfully, hoping, by non-observance of his strange nervousness, to enable him to get over it. 'Not quite. Only a novice, on trial.'

'Thank God!' he ejaculated solemnly, in a low tone.

'Margaret,' he added, after a moment's pause; 'what have you to do with Lord Littmass? I mean in what way, and to what extent are you under his authority?'

'I know not,' she answered, surprised at his broaching a subject that was entirely new between them. 'I have never thought of inquiring.'

'You do not know if it was out of pure benevolence that he undertook charge of you when a child?'

'I believe there was some provision left for me by my parents, but of the amount or conditions I know nothing. I have always looked on Lord Littmass as a sort of distant father, who now and then condescends from his high occupations to legislate for me out of regard for my parents.'

'And you mean to live on listlessly and aimlessly, regardless of the world and of society, of life and its duties, and not caring to use your womanhood, but leaving your fate to the indifferent arbitration of this lordly providence!'

He purposely infused a tinge of bitterness into his words, for he judged such a tonic wanting to rouse her from her life of dreams. His being able to do this, proved him to be again master of himself, and superior to the emotion that had at first overcome him.

It was the first time Margaret had ever heard such a tone addressed to her by any one. She started up as if intending to pour out a torrent of exclamations. Maynard inwardly rejoiced at the vigour of her attitude, thinking, 'If she reproaches me, it is because she cares for me.' But she spoke not until she had nearly resumed her former position, and then quietly and humbly.

'You used to tell me that I was an apt pupil. What is it that you wish to teach me now?'

James's self-command completely broke down before the unexpected and winning gentleness of this answer.

'Forgive me!' he cried. 'I must be mad to speak to you so. Why will you force me to love you, when I have before told you of my unhappy position, which makes it impossible for me to fulfil my longing.'

Margaret was speechless, but turned upon him a look so full of wonderment and pain that he at once perceived that the only consequence of his unguarded utterance would be to deprive him of her friendship without converting it into love. Dreading such a result, he hastened to undo the effect of his words.

'We are both waifs,' he said, apologetically. 'Early alike orphaned and consigned to the same care; and it seems so natural that sympathy should exist between us, that I for a moment suffered imagination to outstrip reality. Will not the pupil forgive her repentant master?'

'I scarcely know what I have to forgive,' said Margaret, 'nor can I account for the pain I felt just now, unless it was because I saw you were moved far beyond my former experience of you. I owe you much gratitude and affection, and those you have freely from me. Beyond those I am unable to go. I am but as a child in the ways of the world, and know nothing of love or its meaning, except as toward my Maker. Our fates are alike in another respect than those you mentioned. For me as well as for you all is forbidden save a solitary life. For you by the external circumstances of your condition. For me by the constitution of my own nature. Such affection and respect as I can give are yours already. You will continue to be my friend, will you not?'

Her sweet tones and kindly words compelled his obedience. He replied, falteringly,—

'I will try to submit; but do not be hard upon me if vain hopes will show themselves. The new vision of life that has thrust itself before me cannot be dismissed at will. Tell me,' he resumed, after a pause, 'what is your destination? Do you remain with your guardian?'

'I know not for certain. The doctors recommend country or sea air: and I believe he is looking for a retired spot where I can freely have both. I shall not know until he returns next week.'

'And, as I remain in town until then, you will allow me to walk here with you daily, will you not?' he asked, imploringly.

'Oh yes, it will be dear old Rome again,' she cried, evidently quite forgetting the last few minutes. 'Only, no pictures, no sculptures, no churches; but this beautiful green turf, and these glorious trees, will supply food for talk. You were always my instructor. You shall here interpret Nature to me. I love its

beauty more than ever since I left my cell,' she said, with a shudder at the reminiscence.

Eagerly did Maynard apply himself to the task thus allotted to him during those few blissful days. For blissful they were to him, in spite of the limitation imposed upon him: not merely because it was happiness to him to be with her; but because he thought that through the interpretation of Nature, love might yet find an entrance into her heart. 'It were a sin,' he said to himself, 'to suffer such a being as this to be wasted. With so much evil and ugliness even springing up in the world, it is a sacred duty for the beautiful and the good to become multiplied. In this alone lies hope for humanity. How can I win her; and, winning her, how maintain her? I will preach to her of life and its duties, as well as of its joys; and, by aid of my science, illustrate the common nature of all things. In the absence of a voice from the heart, perchance she will obey her conscience. The blasphemy which she committed against God and man by entering that accursed convent, shall be atoned by obedience to the divine laws of our being. The Girl must be taught to become a Woman; and I——I! how do I know that I shall benefit thereby, and not another? How, if I am educating her for another to win? decking the shrine for a stranger to worship at?'

The thought struck through him like a sword; and, at one glance, the lightning-flash of jealousy revealed to him all the dread depths of feeling that lay at the foundation of his nature, never before suspected, never again, he trusted, to be thus lighted up.

'Oh merciful God!' he cried, in the intensity of his momentary anguish; 'nevermore let me see myself thus; but let the very memory of this moment die, never to revive.'

Deeply humiliated as James felt at the discovery he had made of the latent possibilities of his own nature, he learnt thereby the might of his passion for Margaret. The stronger that passion appeared to him to be, the farther it seemed to remove him from Margaret's sphere. Yet in this very unlikeness he found room for hope. Utterly unable as she was to comprehend his feeling, she had no instinct that prompted her to shrink from him; and that which was denied to love, might she not yet yield to compassion? On any terms he would take her; and, this achieved, would not the rest be sure to follow in the train of such devotion as he would pay her?

Maynard fancied he was solving the mystery of Margaret's dissympathy. Of her perfection he had no doubt. That was an article of faith beyond dispute. It must be owing to some particular arrest of development, he thought, bringing his botanical knowledge to bear upon his analysis of her. 'Can there be any physical weakness; any radical defect of health?'

Alarmed at the idea, he sought Lord Littmass's medical attendant, and introduced into his conversation an apparently casual remark about Miss Waring's extreme delicacy of constitution. He was a practitioner of the old school, shrewd and eccentric; but not disdaining new lights.

'She delicate!' cried the physician; 'not a bit of it. Not a weak spot in her. If anything, she is too strong; too slow of development for the taste of an age that likes pace even in its women. A hardy plant, she does not shoot up into completeness one day to wither the next. Too much brain at the top of her head, perhaps, for most people; but with such a spine as hers to support it, there is nothing to fear. A little of the real education of life will soon send the blood circulating through her whole system, and equalise her developments. I have great faith in people's spines. In one I can see beauty without strength, and in another strength without beauty. But in hers I find them combined in a very rare degree. Sir, the spine is the basis of the character physical and moral. In that delicate thread which runs throughout its entire length, and culminates in the brain, protected against the chance of injury as no other part of the body is, there resides the *moi*, or individual self-hood; and thence radiate all the nerves and their emotions. Why, there is scarcely a twist of opinion but may be traced to its corresponding curve in the spine. Only the other day a lady came to consult me about her daughter, who was taken, she said, with some strange religious fancies. 'Tell me no more, madam,' I said, 'but let me examine her spine.' I did so; and said at once that I should not be surprised to find that she was inclined to join the sect of Plymouth Brethren. Her mother was astonished, and owned that she was attached to a clergyman who had entered that very communion. Another time I was examining the back of a girl whose parents are strict Protestants; plain, downright, matter-of-fact people, alike incapable of logical sequence, and devoid of imagination. Well, their two positives had produced a negative; and the daughter's back-bone was the natural re-action from the parents'

self-opiniatedness. The vertebræ lacked consolidation, and indicated a total absence of self-reliance. I cautioned them that if they treated her injudiciously, and did not give her plenty of healthy exercise for both mind and body, she would be sure, some day, to turn Roman Catholic. They considered themselves so insulted by the suggestion of such a possibility for a daughter of theirs, that they never called me in again. The girl, however, some time afterwards, left her home and joined a Sisterhood.'

Maynard obtained another testimony to the perfection of Margaret's spinal column. The dame told him that at Paris, on their way home from the convent, it was necessary to employ a dress-maker; and that this personage was so struck, first, by the young lady's extreme look of delicacy and emaciated frame, and then by the unexpected straightness and regularity of her spine, that she exclaimed,—

'Ah, mon Dieu! quel ange! such a back must not be let to grow wings before its time.'

To draw Margaret from the life she dwelt apart, pure, luminous, and dreamy as a star in its halo; her imagination fixed on the vague ideal suggested by the beautiful things of earth; this was the task Maynard had now set himself. He saw that she was one whom nought unlovely touched, or, at least, soiled; for she had no perception of the contrary of beauty or goodness. She was a very sensitive plant in this respect, shrinking and closing at once in presence of all that was unsympathetic to her; but opening, as to her whole nature, to the influence of the genuine and pure. Such power had their attraction over her imagination, that she could have gone as a martyr to the fire, rapt in unconsciousness of the external, and subduing torment by faith in the unseen.

Fully understanding that she dwelt in a charmed circle, into which nought that was not of the loftiest could enter, Maynard forced beneath the control of his intellect the love that burnt and raged within him; and sought for a process whereby he might unconsciously to her transform her sense of passive beauty into one of duty, her sympathy with the abstract into a personal feeling. To achieve this, he thought, it would be well to disclose to her more fully the nature of the world of which she was an individualised portion, and convince her that she would be attaining a truer harmony with it by adding the beauty of Doing to that of Being.

James felt that as a man he was not unworthy to be entrusted with even her affection; but he might have despaired of winning it, had he been less of a natural philosopher. On his knowledge that the laws of attraction are to be brought into operation by the conjunction of affinities, as well as by the exhibition of opposites, he founded his hopes of success. Margaret must be won from the abstract to the concrete, as a soul from heaven to earth, without having the tender susceptibilities, of which her ethereal nature was composed, scared by contact with too gross an element. Maynard felt that it was necessary to lay the foundations of his achievement in the brief interval that remained before their guardian's return.

He had a conviction that Lord Littmass was averse to his holding any acquaintance with Margaret, though the grounds of that conviction were of a merely negative kind,—principally the seclusion in which she had been kept, the absence of any reference to her in conversation, and the demeanour of her old nurse. To Margaret herself it never occurred that any one was specially influencing or controlling her life. She lived as flowers live, enjoying the bounties of light, air, and shower, and giving out beauty and fragrance in return, but knowing nothing of a hand that tended her; and James was careful not to suggest that in being intimate with him she might be opposing and thwarting her guardian's wishes respecting her. He read her well enough to be aware that, while to support misfortune and suffering she would bring the strength of an immortal, yet beneath a sense of wrong done by her she would inevitably droop and wither away.

His object in the conversations which he held with her during this interval was to reveal to her his view of the meaning of the Universe, and the necessary and intimate relations between its material and its spiritual, its physical and its mental parts; and to show her that it could attain its highest development only by all portions of it fulfilling their part in the general advance, and living up to the greatest capacity of their natures.

'Nature,' he said, 'leads no merely desultory existence, content to enjoy and to be admired of itself; but is ever working as well as being, unfolding new possibilities, and advancing toward higher results. We are told that each night that closed a day in the history of Creation was followed by another day in which a fresh step was made towards perfection: that even geologic catastrophe and desolation have conduced to

the production of higher and more complex forms of life. And if growth be the inherent law of nature in respect of material and non-sentient existence, who can doubt that it is to be equally predicated of the moral, the intellectual, and the emotional world, which is the object and highest result, the flower and fruit of the physical universe? Crystals have their beauty and their use, certainly, but they are sterile and unproductive, and I should be sorry to see you content with being one of the crystals of humanity.'

'Yet they are immortal and have no trouble or fatigue of existence,' said Margaret, sighing. 'I suspect that my heaven is one of rest, rather than of progress or movement. But pray do not think that I claim to have reached perfection. I am only really unconscious of a want. If nature has omitted to supply me with the impulse to activity which animates the rest, does that not indicate that my special function is to rest and be thankful?'

'It is a common attempt at compliment to tell a woman that she is an angel,' returned Maynard, laughing. 'Now, I hold the angel to be the inferior of the two, and would promote you to be a woman. The sense of human duty is above that of abstract perfection. It educates the individual for the benefit of all. If we were intended for a passive and merely contemplative existence, it might be different; but having human powers and affections, we are clearly out of place while inert and indifferent. God works in and through the human mind and emotions as much as in other departments of existence. But, perhaps, I am forgetting that you have been ill, and need a long sleep of mind and feeling to renovate you for the real work of life, the work which brings the highest reward and enjoyment, the work of fulfilling one's nature.'

'You are very good to find an excuse for my indolence,' said Margaret; 'but, tell me, I hope all your own affairs have gone as you wish?'

'I have nothing beyond my studies to occupy my interest,' returned Maynard, 'and whenever I work they go on. My fellowship provides me the means of living, but it also cuts me off from the ordinary hopes and ambitions of men. As a college Fellow I may say with the Fiend in "Festus,"

> 'I know
> Nor joy nor sorrow; but a changeless tone
> Of sadness like the night wind's is the strain
> Of what I have of feeling.'

If I have not reproached you for entering that convent, it is because I have no right to cast a stone on such account, who have myself virtually taken a vow of renunciation of love and manhood by partaking of an endowment based on the same monastic principle. Hailing all light as I do, I scarcely feel glad to have the veil removed from my eyes, now that it is possibly too late to change my career.'

'Yet such a life as yours must have many consolations,' said Margaret. 'You used to speak of its exemption from care and anxiety, and the freedom to follow your own bent whithersoever it might lead you.'

'Excepting in one direction. There is a time appointed unto men,' said James, solemnly, 'to contemn the selfishness of isolation, and yearn for the sympathies of human ties. Were we but mere intellects, the life would be perfect. As it is, the awakening to the consciousness of our complex natures brings only agony and regret, against which we can only strive by rushing into fresh activities.'

'What is the usual mode of escape?'

'Taking a college living when about fifty years of age, and compensating a wasted manhood by teaching catechisms to ploughboys: unless in the rare instance of marrying a woman who has money enough for two, or more.'

CHAPTER XI.

So James Maynard met and conversed with Margaret Waring in the interval before the return of Lord Littmass to London. Ever studying the problem how to bridge the gulf which divided their natures, and lead her gently over to his own side; ever watching narrowly her every change and growth, he sometimes thought he could perceive a gradual advance in her ideas towards the more real and practical interests of life; or, at least, an increase of sympathy with himself in his philosophic inquiries and practical pursuits, if not a more personal regard and readiness to sympathise with his regrets at the hopeless bondage of freedom with which he was tied.

'She can pity if she cannot love,' was his verdict upon her.

'My best hope is in making myself familiar and necessary to her. Let me continue to be to her more and more as a friend and brother, and perchance habit will do the rest.'

But though he contrived his demeanour so as not to arouse suspicion of any personal ulterior object, he strove in vain to hide from himself the thought of his real position. The habitual receipt of an easy subsistence, 'paid quarterly,' does not sharpen men's minds in the matter of ways and means. James knew nothing of money-making. And he knew less of Margaret's position. If she was dependent on her guardian's bounty, Lord Littmass would probably be glad to get her settled; but this could only be by marrying her to some one able to support her; and that some one could not be himself, seeing that his sole means of subsistence vanished from him if he married. But of the two tortures by which he was racked, by far the worst was his doubt of her ever coming to really care for him.

After much debate with himself, James resolved to attain some certainty by speaking with Lord Littmass about her; and to lose no time in seeking an appointment in which his scientific knowledge and practical abilities would enable him to dispense with his fellowship. Even now was he engaged on an analysis of minerals for a mining company, whose territory he had lately visited in South America, for which he did not think of requiring payment. But henceforth he would seek regular employment of a remunerative kind. He would make himself independent of his fellowship; and he would present to Margaret the spectacle of a man of aspiration and capacity, whose life was being wasted and ruined for love of her. And he would obtain Lord Littmass's consent to their marriage; and if this was not accorded, well, they might dispense with it.

In this way did Maynard's resolution to hazard his whole life on the chance of winning Margaret rapidly take form and consistency, and assume the dimensions of an absorbing and overwhelming passion. Subtle and versatile as his mind was, he could not altogether conquer his habit of looking at all sides of a question. But when the thought did suggest itself to him that the difficulties were insurmountable, or that even if the longed-for result were the best that could happen to him, yet it might not be the best for Margaret and for her happiness, he thrust the suggestion from him with a fierceness that surprised himself, and revealed to him the existence of hitherto unsuspected depths in his nature. Love, whose very existence he had

so long ignored, fastened its portentous grasp upon him, and, as if in revenge for its worship long neglected, made its relentless power felt through every fibre of his inmost being. All open and unprepared for its assault, it tore and raged through him, as the equinoctial blast among the defenceless pines on a mountain-top, until it sent him to his knees in his agony, and he cried aloud as to an actual, conscious, personal tyrant, 'Spare me, spare me, and I *will* win her.'

Hastening, yet half-dreading, to meet her after such an accession of the delirium of his love, Maynard would feel the influence of her saintlike calmness steal over his spirit and sink into his soul, creating in him a mood which he recognised as the most blissful of his life, could he only have her by him to produce it ever. So essential a part of herself did this intense repose and quietness of temperament seem to be, that he felt that the very eagerness and activity of sentiment which she was the means of arousing and stimulating in him, would excite in her dissympathy and aversion. Yet, in spite of its overwhelming strength, so well did James learn to control all expression of his feeling, since its first outbreak, that Margaret very soon entirely forgot that he had ever addressed her, save as the friend and brother he had always been to her. The idea of any man being in love with her, or of her marrying anybody, was so dim and remote that her imagination had failed to take it in, and to realise it as a possibility. And so long as James did not again betray himself, his return to his former accustomed demeanour put the momentary exception altogether out of her head.

CHAPTER XII.

THE return of Lord Littmass was looked to with very different feelings by James and Margaret. She, hoping, fearing, desiring nothing, was altogether indifferent on the matter. The utmost change it was likely to make in the routine of her life, was to impose occasionally a slight degree of formality upon it, or lead to her leaving London for the more congenial seaside; an event which Maynard did not yet venture to flatter himself would be accompanied by regret for him. He, on the other

hand, hoped, feared, desired everything. At times he admitted to himself that Lord Littmass was omnipotent in all that concerned him. At others, he felt that he had it in himself to be the superior, by virtue of the energy of his character, the force of his will, and above all, by the power of his love for Margaret; and that by their aid he would turn any resistance that Lord Littmass might offer into a means of compliance.

The terms which existed between himself and his guardian were of such a character as to make it impossible to found any augury upon them. Lord Littmass was ever civil, brief, and cold, treating him with a sort of peremptory suggestiveness that implied an expectation of compliance rather than a claim to obedience or affection. James had thus come to regard him in the light of an unwilling benefactor, who performed as a duty a task which was imposed upon him in virtue of some antecedent obligation.

Lord Littmass was a man who never betrayed an emotion, or assumed a responsibility which he could escape. For many years he had had no intimates. His literary and political relations were alliances, rather than friendships. The general view of his life was that of a man somewhat morose and self-absorbed, but gifted with a large measure of artistic power and political insight, which he contrived always to use for his own self-advancement; a man, too, intensely proud and haughty. His demeanour and mode of life encouraged the idea that he had a solid foundation of wealth to sustain his position, and give him the weight that he undoubtedly had in the world. But to a certain extent he was a sham, and he knew it: and to this self-consciousness was in a great degree to be attributed his cold and distant demeanour towards most of those with whom he came into contact. Especially was this the case with James Maynard. Lord Littmass, while assuming the air of an immeasurable superiority, whether on the score of birth, of age, of wealth, of position, or of talent, was really in his heart afraid to encounter the keen perceptions of the son whom he refused to acknowledge. Proud of him and of his abilities, he yet denied him his affection and society, because he reminded him of his hated marriage and disgraceful conduct: a marriage of which few persons were aware, and none of his immediate acquaintances living, except his cousin, Lady Bevan; and conduct, the full extent of the wickedness of which was known only to himself.

Such was Lord Littmass, and such were Maynard's relations to the man to whom he was about to reveal the inmost secret and longing of his heart, and from whom he had to court a rebuff on his tenderest point. But he had made up his mind to regard such a rebuff, should it come, as merely an obstacle to be conquered. He deemed himself bound to obedience by no tie of gratitude, since it was too clear that Lord Littmass's lofty patronage of him and supervision of his career derived their motive from some obligation that existed prior to and independently of his own existence. In anticipating the reception his communication might meet with, he even determined beforehand on the demeanour he would assume; almost on the words he would use; a novel course for James Maynard, whose most obvious characteristic was the abrupt spontaneousness of everything he did. It proved that though mastered by his passion he was not paralysed; but could intently bend all his powers to the achievement of his paramount object; the sole mode of being mastered that proves true manhood, when all fears and anxieties are suppressed that may interfere with the desired end; and all the faculties that can aid are kept on the alert, the resolve to succeed dominating the self-indulgence of weakness.

James felt that he was entering on the first great struggle of his life, before which all his previous emulations of school and college were as child's play;—with not merely a triumph or a money-reward dependent on the issue; not even the happiness of his life merely; but his whole character and usefulness for evermore as a man. Failure to win Margaret he felt meant failure of his whole career here, and perchance hereafter. It was his utter destruction as an individual. Between his love and his fear he was stirred to the very foundation of his nature, and compelled to own the very theory he had once most derided, the fact he had never realized. The consciousness that he was but the half of a human totality, even if true, might be endured; but the discovery of his other half, the completion and complement of himself, once made, and his intense yearnings to it once excited, nought henceforth but union with it could possibly make existence endurable. That such was the final cause of Margaret's existence also, he could not doubt, though he allowed that the revelation thereof had not yet been made to her. But attraction and affinity were things that could not be all on one side. Each particle of earth attracts the sun as much as each particle of the sun attracts the earth. The acid has as strong

an affinity for the alkali as the alkali for the acid. What are men and women but sun and earth; or as alkalis and acids, requiring only suitable conditions of electricity, temperature, or conjunction, to ensure combination?

CHAPTER XIII.

Lord Littmass was by no means a family man. He had no social intimacies with any inmate of his house. On the evening of his return he dined alone; and after dinner he sent for Margaret. He had seen her immediately after her return from the convent, when pale and thin from the Carmelite régime.

'Consumptive,' he had then said to himself. 'Poor child, it will save us both a good deal of trouble.'

Looking at her now as she entered the room in obedience to his summons, and expecting to find written on her face the progress of the complaint that was to solve all difficulties, he started with surprise at seeing the improvement made during the month of his absence.

'Hectic? No, the colour must be a healthy one, for she has gained flesh and firmness of gait.'

He addressed her kindly, and with a tinge of admiration in his manner.

'London agrees with you, I see. Its murky skies have turned your lilies into roses.'

'Thank you, I am much stronger since I came here. I hope you are well, and have had a pleasant journey.'

Lord Littmass scarcely knew which to admire most, the quiet self-possession with which she ventured to bandy compliments with him, or the sweet and steadfast tones of her voice. There was no longer the abstracted, pre-occupied air which he had accustomed himself to attribute to mental imbecility.

'And what have you been doing with yourself?'

'I have been very idle as to everything except getting well. The fine weather and a kind companion have tempted me daily into the gardens.'

'All the doctors in the world could not have done better for you. Idleness, air, and exercise will cure most maladies.'

'I scarcely seem to be idle when talking with one so full of information, and so ready to impart it, as Mr Maynard.'

'Whom did you say?' exclaimed Lord Littmass.

'Mr Maynard.'

'James Maynard,—my—my ward, that was?'

'Yes, he is a great friend of mine; the only friend I have had to talk to. I hope you are not displeased?' she added, seeing the troubled expression of his face.

Lord Littmass quickly recovered his self-possession, and said:

'I was surprised because I did not know he was in England. I did not expect him to return just yet. Yes, he is an exceedingly well-informed person, but I did not think that young ladies were much in his way.'

'Then I must esteem his kindness to me the more——' began Margaret, and stopped, suddenly remembering what she had for some time quite forgotten, Maynard's outbreak of passion for her in the Park. Lord Littmass observed her embarrassment, but did not in the least appear to do so.

'I think,' he said, 'that I have discovered a place where you will pick up health still faster than in London. You do not dislike the sea, I suppose?'

'I love it dearly,' answered Margaret, 'and could listen for ever to its voice. I shall never forget the summer I spent by the Mediterranean with Lady Primavera. It was so delightfully lonely.'

'You are fond of solitude? That will just do.'

'It never seems to be solitude with the changeable yet constant sea for my companion.'

'She does not speak as if she had any fancies about men in her mind,' thought Lord Littmass. 'I wonder what has happened. James is as much of a monk as this child is of a nun. I hope he has not discovered that he is unsuited for the vocation. It is most unlucky that they should have met thus, and will make it additionally difficult for me to carry out my plans in regard to her.'

'I have been practising some of the convent chants which I learnt in Rome. You said that you would like to hear them when I should be strong enough to sing,' said Margaret. 'May I try them for you now?'

He had forgotten all about the matter, but . assented graciously, and Margaret sat down to the piano and commenced singing. Her voice was at first child-like and faltering, as if she were trying to remember a half-forgotten lesson. It then assumed volume and strength, as if she were becoming more certain of herself, and more forgetful of her audience. At length the notes poured forth, full, rich, and powerful, in all the exultant freedom of a rapt and glorying nature. On no familiar opera or hackneyed ballad did Margaret expend her powers. The chant she sang had never before been heard out of the convent where she had learnt it. Wild, weird, and quaint, it had been the special possession and glory of the sisterhood for many generations, and under its influence they had learnt to despise alike the good and evil of this world, and to realise beforehand the triumphs of that toward which their whole lives professed to be an aspiration.

Lord Littmass at first scarcely heeded the young and timid tones. They simply induced him to say to himself, 'She is but a child, although so tall.' Then, as the voice grew in strength, 'The lungs seem sound. Those notes are more befitting her age.' Then, when swelling into her full power, she seemed to him in richness of tone and purity of musical sentiment to surpass the best foreign artistes he had been accustomed to engage for the delectation of his fashionable acquaintances, he turned round in his chair, and gazed at her with astonishment, and murmured,

'Why, this is something new, indeed. Now she is a woman, with heart, voice, and feeling, far beyond either her years or her experiences.'

She ceased, her voice dying away in softest cadences, as if full of a realised bliss which she feared to dispel by a sound. Her hands rested still upon the keys, and she seemed entirely forgetful of all things around her. She was back again in Rome, and beginning to shrink from the cell for which she had left it, when she was startled back into consciousness by the voice of her guardian, saying,—

'Thank you. I like it immensely. I had no idea your voice was so strong, and, I may say, good. I am not surprised at the nuns wishing to get you among them. Did you sing at the French convent, too?'

'No, everything was so different there, so gloomy. I should soon have died there, I believe.'

'Well, you may say good-night now, and in two or three days you may be singing to the loud-resounding sea, as Homer calls it.'

'There,' he said to himself, when Margaret had retired, 'I have seen just enough of her to suggest a character that will exactly suit my new novel, "Arrested Developments." If I see more at present, the harmony of the picture presented to my mind may be destroyed. Such is the function of Genius, from a part to imagine the whole, as the anatomist from a single bit of bone restores the entire structure. That, however, is rather memory than creation. Creation! pooh, the Artist does not create; he remembers, and he adapts. Yes, adaptation is the word. Genius is adaptation. Shakespeare is the greatest of adapters; though James gives the palm to the Emperor Constantine.—That girl's singing is a phenomenon. It represents the three eras of woman. It is worthy of an ode.'

Then, after a little thought, Lord Littmass took out his note-book, and rapidly wrote down some lines.

'There, I think something of that kind will do to introduce with the character,' he said, reading them aloud. 'I don't much like that epitomising stanza. I should prefer "Love" to "Wife," and perhaps "Heart" is better than "All." No, the alliteration of "Wife" is indispensable, though it is rather an anti-climax in sentiment. The public don't think so, however,—yet. The "All" is certainly best, poetically speaking; though, conventionally, it may be too comprehensive. However, the song points to matrimony, which is what the young ladies who sing ballads in drawing-rooms want. I will get V—— to write one of her charming airs for it, and have it published separately as a song from Lord Littmass's new novel, "Arrested Developments," which will be a capital advertisement for the book. V—— won't be able to help me with the words, though. True musician like, all words are the same to her. She values only the idea contained in them, and it is that which she seeks to express in her music. If they are too warm, however, she will find that out fast enough, and I can then use the cooler phrases. No, I have it. "All" with a small *a* confines its reference to what immediately precedes it. Yes, that will do. Now for a fair copy of it.

"SONG.

"SHE SANG, AND——"

"She sang, and softly fell each word,
So simple, pure, and sweet,
As utter'd by a holy child,—
I fain would kiss her feet.

"She sang, and older, statelier grown,
Like youthful queen she stands:
Her voice so noble, arch, and gay,
I fain would kiss her hands.

"She sang, and lo! her heart is found;
A woman, strong—and weak:
Such tenderness inspires each tone,
I fain would kiss her cheek.

"I fain would clasp her in these arms,
She saint, and I the shrine:
That as child, maiden, woman, wife,
Feet, hands, cheek, all be mine."'

'I should like to hear Sophia Bevan sing those words. Fine creature as she is, I doubt if she would relish them. She and Margaret are as different as earth and heaven, though each perfect in their kind. Never mind, I will dedicate the song to Sophia, and she shall introduce it to the London season. Thus in this modern age, does Art ally itself to Business.'

Lord Littmass read over his verses once more, and then continued his musings, first about his ripening plot, in which Margaret, or rather the character suggested to him by Margaret, was to play a leading part; then on the young lady herself; and, lastly, by a sudden transition, on James Maynard.

'If she lives, I may have trouble with her,' he meditated. 'Would to goodness I could replace her fortune. If she goes on improving as she has done, and once appears in society, or is seen by her aunt, my position will become most awkward. Her death alone would have set matters right. I should have inherited under her father's will, and none would have known that I had anticipated the reversion. I must keep her hidden now, more than ever. Why did I let her come away from that convent? Confound that meddling Bishop! And what does James mean by coming in my absence, and playing the civil to her? If once he takes into his head a fancy for marrying her, no consideration of prudence will stop him. What trouble I had to get him to take his degree and accept his fellowship. I don't believe he will ever take Orders to keep it beyond the

seven years. "Religious scruples. Did not believe enough of what he had to sign." As if he wasn't already as good a Christian as half the bishops; only he does not know it. I suppose he will call to-morrow, when I shall have to start him off on a new journey. Poor fellow, how little he thinks that I——.'

Here Lord Littmass's cogitations terminated in a sigh, after which he slowly rose from his seat, and, deep in thought, retired to rest.

CHAPTER XIV.

When James Maynard called next morning, Lord Littmass received him with his usual manner, a manner whose predominant quality was of the kind that equally gratifies the subservient, and disgusts the independent of spirit, and goes by the name of 'affability.' It was the nearest approach to cordiality which Lord Littmass ever permitted himself to practise in his intercourse with men. His maxim was ever to be proud with men, and humble with women. To the constant observance of this rule he owed much of his success in society. It was not, as might at first sight appear, that he really despised men and honoured women. Rather, in his secret thought, were men beings to be feared, and women beings to be cajoled. His hauteur with men was a screen which he interposed between himself and a too scrutinising analysis. His humility with women, was, if a compliment at all, a compliment to their love of conquest. 'Infallible as regarding their female sex,' was the article on them in his creed. 'You may take,' he had said, 'the twelve cleverest men that ever lived, and cast them into one man, and the twelve stupidest women and cast them into one woman, and that woman will take in that man.' Lord Littmass's affability, however, was lost upon Maynard, who looked upon it as an unpleasant habit, but one that concerned only the person who used it, and he ignored it accordingly.

After a few expressions of condescending interest in his recent visit to South America, and a few questions about the political and social condition of Brazil, and its eligibility for in-

vestments, Lord Littmass, who did not fail to observe that James seemed preoccupied and less at his ease than usual, took advantage of mention being made of mines, to ask him if he could easily qualify himself for undertaking a charge in respect of a certain mining company in which he was a proprietor, and if he would like to accept the commission in case it could be obtained for him.

'Where is it situated?' asked Maynard.

'In Mexico.'

'Would it suffice to replace my fellowship in case—in case circumstances prevent my retaining it?'

'In case you wish to marry, for instance?'

'In case I wish to be free to remain a layman after its present term has expired, or in any other contingency.'

'Situations of trust connected with mines are always well paid,' replied Lord Littmass. 'But a Mexican *Real* is hardly the place to take an English gentlewoman to. Am I taking too great a liberty in asking if you have met any one in the Brazils who has tempted you into rebellion against the restrictions imposed by your fellowship?'

'Oh, dear no,' returned James, forcing a laugh; 'I at present aim only at being free. Other holders of fellowships marry when they succeed to college-livings. I feel debarred from this resource, and desire to place myself in an equally good position.'

'Such cautiousness and precision are quite a new phase in his character,' thought Lord Littmass. 'It really looks as if he has a secret from me.' Then he said, kindly,—

'You will allow that I have always been ready to aid you in life, and I am sure that you will not withhold your confidence whenever you think I can serve you: so I will not press you for it now. The matter on which I have to speak to you, is this. I and some others have been forming a provisionary partnership with a view to purchase and work some mines represented as very valuable, and lying at some distance to the north of the city of Mexico.'

'Guanaxuato, probably.'

'Yes, do you know the locality?'

'Only by description.'

'Well, the working of these mines has been for several years in abeyance, owing, among other causes, to disagreements in the family of the proprietors. We propose in the first

instance to dispatch an intelligent and trustworthy agent to inquire into the past history and present condition of the property, in fact, to ascertain its actual value, together with the prospects and probable cost of re-opening it. The enterprise will require a fair knowledge of Spanish, a familiarity with minerals, especially silver ores, and the modes of extraction, a certain amount of engineering knowledge, and a general aptitude for, and shrewdness in, business matters.'

'The task is one that would suit me, and I believe that I should also suit it,' said James; 'but so far as I understand at present, the engagement does not necessarily involve continued employment, even should my preliminary investigation prove satisfactory.'

'You will understand that I do not desire to force myself upon your confidence,' returned Lord Littmass: 'but I must observe that you appear to me to be aiming at being placed in a better position than your compeers, when you seek, at the age of seven or eight-and-twenty, a freedom which they rarely attain until forty or fifty. This is only comprehensible to me on the hypothesis that you have not so completely escaped entanglement as you would have me to suppose.'

James was struck by the whimsical turn the interview, of which he expected so much, had taken. He had come fully intending to speak openly to Lord Littmass. And now in proportion as Lord Littmass sought to force his confidence, the more firmly resolved he became to withhold it. So in answer to the last appeal he said,—

'My lord, I grant and am grateful for all the kindness I have received from you. You are too conversant with human nature not to be aware that a man's character or constitution may in its growth pass through various changes, and prompt him to aspire to various ambitions or careers, for which, while detecting the aspiration, he is yet unable to assign the motive. Believe that I am passing through such a process, and humour the impulse if you will; and be assured, that whenever the time comes for me to own such a confidence, I shall deem it at once a duty and a privilege to lay it before you.'

The seriousness and dignity with which he spoke convinced Lord Littmass both that it would be of no use to endeavour by direct questioning to sound him further, and also that his own surmises were founded in fact; for if it were with a stranger that

James was contemplating marriage there would be no reason for concealment from him.

The conversation was here interrupted by Lord Littmass being called to see a visitor in another room, and James employed the interval of his absence in reviewing his position. He had already resolved to wait until assured that Margaret reciprocated his attachment before giving his confidence to her guardian. But now it occurred to him that he might be acting wrongly in secretly endeavouring to win her affections without affording Lord Littmass an opportunity of declaring himself for or against his proposals. At one moment it seemed to be a duty to give him fair notice, and if Lord Littmass's objection was founded on no sound reason, he would try and win her in spite of him. And at another moment he thought that as Lord Littmass possessed no real parental authority over either of them, they had a right to arrange their own future for themselves.

It was under this final phase of his reflections that Maynard resolved to seek Margaret and learn his fate from her without taking her guardian into his confidence at all. Whatever might be her decision, the engagement in Mexico, a new element in the complication, would suit either emergency. If favourable, it might enable him to give up his fellowship and marry her. If unfavourable, it might save him from going mad by giving him active occupation at a distance from her. This last resolution was fixed by the reflection that, after all, the engagement might prove but a temporary one, as it would depend very much upon the report he would have to make respecting the property.

He had thus completed to his satisfaction the round of the reflections which crowded upon him, when a message was brought requesting his presence in Lord Littmass's study. Arrived there he was introduced to the chairman of the embryo company, of which Lord Littmass had spoken.

In addition to being uncle to Edmund Noel, Mr Tresham was a name and a power in the City. His whole style and deportment indicated his consciousness of this fact. He was a fine man, of considerable and solid dimensions, and far advanced in the interval between middle and old age. His quick restless eye bespoke him a speculator by constitution, but the head that rose above it was of such conformation as to indicate the

possession of sound and steady judgment. The kindly expression of his face and voice did not prompt the idea that he could on proper occasion exhibit such firmness and decision as really belonged to him. Estimating him at a glance, Maynard was somewhat surprised to find that an ally of Lord Littmass's could make so favourable an impression upon him.

Mr Tresham was principally famous for the multitude of shares he held in various adventures in all parts of the world, and his reputation for sagacity and good fortune made him an authority in all speculative enterprises. He was the originator of the present scheme for re-opening the *Real de Dolores*, a once famous silver mine in the rich mineral district of Guanaxuato; and he had his own reasons for putting what might be a good thing in Lord Littmass's way. For the same reasons he was disposed to favour the appointment of Lord Littmass's protégé.

The table was covered with maps of Mexico, and plans of the property, and a variety of documents all in Spanish, which were duly pointed out to Maynard with a view to enabling him to understand exactly what was required of him.

'But a practical knowledge of ores and machinery is not what we require in the agent who undertakes this part of the commission,' observed Mr Tresham, in answer to some remarks of James's by which he showed that he was familiar with such matters. 'We want in the first place rather a diplomat, and a man of legal acumen, to investigate on the spot the accuracy of the statements contained in these documents. The system of falsifying Government returns and forging Government land warrants, has long prevailed, and to such an extent, that the very mine and tract of country represented here may easily have no existence whatever; and, if it exist, there may be no sound title with it. Again, the mine may have been closed on other accounts, than those adduced. Such, again, has been the unsettled state of Mexico for many years, that many a mine has been stopped to escape the forced contributions made by the Government of the day. These exactions however, we are assured, have been almost exclusively confined to native proprietors. The prospect of such ruinous interference being extended to foreign owners will be one subject for investigation. But the main points to be ascertained are the value of the property and the validity of the title. All else, though highly important, is merely collateral. Your labours, if you take the engagement, will commence in the capital, where you will examine the family

archives in what respects the mine, and the official government returns of which these purport to be an exact copy. The former are accessible on payment of a fee to the family lawyer who holds them in trust, and the latter of course are public property. This part of the mission, as you no doubt perceive, is one requiring some delicacy and tact, as well as an intimate acquaintance with the language. It will afterwards be your duty to proceed to the spot, and by aid of a competent staff to make the requisite examination.'

'Tell me,' said Maynard, who had kept his eye on the maps while listening to this speech, 'have you got the plans of the adjoining estates, especially of those which lie on each side in the direction taken by the vein?'

'No; why?'

'Because these diagrams do not indicate how near to either limit of the property the lode lies or has been worked; so that we are in the dark as to how far it can be followed without trespassing. For another reason, too, it is necessary to know all about the adjoining lands. This mine having been closed for several years, its neighbours may have sunk down upon a continuation of the vein, and worked it beyond their own boundaries, far into this very property, completely exhausting it.'

Mr Tresham nodded his satisfaction to Lord Littmass, and said he was delighted to find how well acquainted with the bearings of the case Mr Maynard was, and that he did not doubt that his introduction to the Board would result in their gladly employing his services. The conversation then turned to the details of the enterprise, the time it would occupy, its cost, and its remuneration.

A suggestion from Lord Littmass that the latter might be safely left to the liberality of the directors, who would decide according to their estimate of the service rendered, was somewhat abruptly negatived by James, who declared that the 'no cure, no pay' principle was altogether vicious, and one to which he could by no means assent. Whether he succeeded or not in securing for the Company a valuable property at a cheap rate, his time and brains would equally be expended in their service; and it would be making him a partner in the speculation to allow his remuneration to be dependent upon results. The amount, therefore, should be determined beforehand; with the prospect, possibly, of a bonus in the event of unanticipated difficulty or success.

'Certainly, certainly,' said Mr Tresham, 'you are quite correct in your view, and I augur, from the clear perception which you have of your own position, that you will be abundantly perspicacious where our interests are concerned. We learn in the City, my lord, to distrust talents which fail to benefit their owner. When do you think, sir, that you will be able to start? The season of the year is, I understand, of little consequence on the elevated plateaux of Mexico.'

'I do not care for climate,' said Maynard, 'and have no personal preparations to delay me.' And here he paused, for he thought of Margaret, and of the possibility of her going with him; a thought at which his heart beat high. But he at once saw its impossibility, and he felt that he should be only too glad to take her promise with him, and return to claim her in a few months, during which he would confirm her affection and interest by his letters to her. 'It will not take long,' he thought, 'to obtain this, if I am to obtain it at all. And if not, the sooner I am dead, or in Mexico, the better.'

'I only want time,' he resumed, 'to collect the necessary implements and books for a thorough investigation. For though I am pretty well up in minerals and their treatment, I learnt what I know in South America; and there are always sundry latest improvements and discoveries to be hunted up, which may save expense in assaying or working. Two or three weeks ought to be sufficient for this, and will give me time, too, to work up some of my South American notes while still fresh in my memory. When does the next steamer go?'

'One month from the day before yesterday. We shall be quite content if you can start then,' said Mr Tresham. 'It is unnecessary to present you to the whole board of directors. His lordship and I form a sufficient quorum.'

After Maynard had taken his leave Mr Tresham said to Lord Littmass,—

'He seems to be the very man for us; clear, cool, and sharp. Has your lordship known him long?'

'From childhood,' said Lord Littmass, drily; 'he is straightforward honesty itself, and penetrating as a Spanish Inquisitor where he is interested. The fortunes of a Company could not be in better hands where a *bonâ fide* business is concerned.'

'And the best of it is,' returned Mr Tresham, 'that he has not the interest that a professional miner would have to make

out a good case; for he has no expectation of getting an engagement to work it himself, provided he reports well of it. Ah, my dear lord, I trust you may never know as much of the doings of mining gentry as I do. Their sole object is to have money pass through their hands; and in proportion to the amount spent are their gains. It is nothing to them whence it comes, whether out of the mine, or the proprietor's pocket. A tunnel here, a shaft there, a drift somewhere else, on the chance of intercepting a vein that may, or may not, be in the neighbourhood. And, would you believe it, we are safer in undertaking a mining enterprise abroad than we should be at home. I had a narrow escape early in my speculating days. I was nearly induced by a clever Welsh lawyer to purchase a coal mine. The prospects were made out to be splendid; a noble vein, and easily worked; a capital plant of machinery on the spot; tramways down to the neighbouring port; a low rent, and moderate royalties: and every chance of the proprietor being returned to represent the county in Parliament. The plan was that I should purchase the works by paying a certain sum down, form a company to repurchase of me and pay the rest, I taking a large number of shares in proof of my confidence in the undertaking, and the vendor retaining a number in proof of his. The previous owner, I was assured, had failed to make a large fortune out of it solely through his bad and wasteful management. I investigated the place, as I believed, thoroughly; and was even taken to see the mine which lies on the same coal-bed a short distance off, and which I knew to be paying well. It is true that I was cautioned by the engineer who accompanied me, against mentioning my intended purchase to any one there. If known to be in the market, I was told, the price would soon rise, and I should have to submit to competition. I little thought that my precaution of taking my own man with me would be neutralised by his being in the pay of the lawyer. Well, all seemed so satisfactory that I was on the eve of parting with my thousands, when I chanced to overhear a conversation while dining in an eating-house at Bristol, which convinced me that the lawyer was a scoundrel and the property worthless. Once put on the right track, I had no difficulty in verifying my suspicion. I at once backed out of my agreement. The lawyer was furious, and threatened to compel me at least to pay a large sum in compensation. I dared him to do so, telling him that the only thing for which he had a right to claim pay-

ment was for the lesson he had given me in swindling. Of course he was afraid of going into court and letting all the world know what I had learnt, and the matter was dropped. Some time afterwards I came across a poor fellow who had been less fortunate; and had actually bought that same property of that same lawyer. The completion of the transfer operated like magic to turn his coal into ashes. And this is how it happened. You must know that there exists in mining parlance a term to express what scientific men call a "solution of continuity." That is the word "Fault," used technically by miners to express any change in a geological stratum by which a vein is broken, or displaced, or altered in quality or direction. Now it happens that across the whole country to which I am referring, there runs one of these faults; and that the veins lying on one side of it are very valuable, while their continuations on the other side are utterly worthless. This fault ran exactly between the mine I have spoken of, and the neighbouring works which I had taken the useless precaution of inspecting, and the mine to be sold was on the wrong side of it. Instead of lying nearly flat, and being easily accessible, the vein dipped so vertically as to be most costly to work; and instead of yielding an excellent and saleable coal, its produce was of so small a character as to be useless until reduced to coke. The result was, that the purchaser found himself saddled with a property not merely worthless, but ruinous even to possess; for there was a dead rent of five hundred a-year to be paid, whether anything was got out or not, and some fifty pounds a-month in wages, to keep the mine open and free from water, and no release to be obtained unless by swindling others as he had been swindled himself; for of course the landlord would not give up his claim. The threat to expose the seller unless he took it back was only laughed at, for he knew that it was impossible to prove the worthlessness of a mine to a jury, when plenty of mining engineers could be found who would swear anything they were paid to swear. My friend declined to try and pass his bad bargain off upon some one else; and so he resolved to appeal to the landlord to revoke his lease. This was refused, and it was only when he threatened to declare himself bankrupt, and actually took steps which showed that he was in earnest, that he obtained a compromise, and got quit of his fatal bargain. Such is the hazard of mining in England. The danger in Mexico is not to be com-

pared to it. There, at least, we can obtain a fee simple, and abandon our property if it fails to pay the working.'

CHAPTER XV.

After Mr Tresham had taken his leave, Lord Littmass remained much occupied in meditating upon the strange revolution that had taken place in James Maynard's character. His eagerness and decision in regard to the money part of the business were something entirely opposed to the indifference on such points which had hitherto characterised his whole life; and were explicable to Lord Littmass only on the supposition that his surmise was correct; and that James, hitherto so careless about money, and devoted to science for its own sake, was now bending all his resolution and powers towards gaining an independent position.

The stronger his conviction grew, the more anxious Lord Littmass became to get rid of him, without his again seeing Margaret. It was easy enough to prevent such an interview, but Lord Littmass was wise enough to know that to gain his end he must not appear to be acting any part in the matter. To interpose arbitrarily any obstacle, he was well aware, would only serve as a stimulus to love, and he was not the man to make a blunder of this kind. Even if Margaret did not care for James as he felt sure that James cared for her, it would be an almost infallible method of exciting her to rebel against such an interference with her disposal of her affections. At least, such would be the case with most girls, and Lord Littmass knew nothing of Margaret to make him suppose that she would act differently from others.

And here it occurred to Lord Littmass that he was in reality a total stranger to his ward; that he had allowed her to grow up in complete ignorance of life and of the ties of human relationship; that he had supplied no possibility of personal affection, no motive for gratitude or obedience. He perceived, in short, that he had placed her in circumstances which forbade the development of any sense of obligation to which he could appeal in support of his authority or his wishes. Occupying

the place of a parent, he had been to her a sort of distant overseer, who, connected with her by some invisible link, controlled her fate without any emotion on his side or reference to feeling on hers. He thus began now to think that he had too long adhered to the view he had taken in her childhood, respecting her delicacy of body and simplicity of mind, and that he had committed a serious blunder in dealing with her fortune upon the strength of his belief that an early termination of her life would relieve him from any possible embarrassment on that score. Little dreaming that he would ever be liable to be called to account, he had followed his ambitious and luxurious career, achieving fame and success by his talents and his lavishness, and contracting the debts which had swallowed up the trust committed to him.

His anxieties on this head had been first awakened when his sister, Lady Primavera, proposed taking Margaret with her to Rome. He learnt then that the sickly child had become a fair though slender girl, and though different from others in character, very far removed from the condition of idiotcy to which his imagination had always relegated her. Her illness and subsequent entrance into a Carmelite convent had renewed his hope of an early release from his responsibility: and it was with no small chagrin that he found himself compelled to consent to her release instead. The first sight of Margaret afterwards renewed his hopes, but only for them to be finally destroyed on his next view of her on his return to London, to which he came back expecting to anticipate James Maynard's return to England. His chagrin was then redoubled. Not only was Margaret fast attaining the status of a healthy and beautiful woman, endowed with rare accomplishments, but James had established with her an intimacy and a friendship which threatened to thwart him in all his cherished schemes, and burst the bubble of his pride in its culminating hour. Such a dénouement must be prevented at all hazards, or Lord Littmass, the ornament of literature and delight of the fashionable world, would, instead of receiving honours from his sovereign's hand, as a citizen distinguished alike for his genius and his worth, be exposed as a sham and a counterfeit, who compensated the brilliancy and rectitude of his external and visible life, by the secret rottenness of his interior.

As thus in his vivid creative imagination the possible future grew distinct to his view, and he realised beforehand the su-

preme agony of his humiliation, and that through the agency of those whom he imagined he had long since consigned to nothingness,—her to the secure grave of an early death—him to the fast grip of collegiate celibacy,—he felt his whole frame collapse as if the circulation were suddenly arrested, and his heart forbidden to fulfil its functions. Gasping with difficulty for breath, he recalled himself sufficiently to be able to fight against the new enemy that had just revealed its presence in his frame. Gradually the strength of his will re-asserted itself, and forced the stricken heart to perform its duty, and propel the warm red life through its customary channels.

'This, then, is to be the end,' he mused, as, exhausted with the struggle for life, he lay back in his chair, half-fearing to move. 'But it will not be yet, now that I know my danger. For the future I must keep emotion for my fictitious characters, without indulging in it myself. I wonder I never made any of them die of heart-spasm. It would be an easy way of getting rid of a troublesome personage, and I shall know by my own experience how to describe the symptoms. Ah, I remember now, my doctor once told me to beware of any indications of faintness, and gave me a cordial which he advised me to keep always within reach at night. He must have referred to an attack of this kind. I put the stuff away without thinking more about it. I will try it now.'

Getting up to look for it in a drawer at the other end of the room, he was astonished at the feebleness that pervaded his entire system. He managed, however, to totter slowly across, supporting himself by the table, and presently, finding the cordial, placed the vial to his lips. For an instant the stimulant took away his breath, and then, as it drove the blood rapidly through his veins, he felt himself once more the hale, erect man, able to laugh at fate and brave despair itself.

'No, no,' he cried aloud. 'Lord Littmass is not to be frightened by shadows. He still holds the threads, and the puppets shall dance as he pleases.'

CHAPTER XVI.

James Maynard found himself curiously perplexed about a matter, which, had his feelings towards Margaret been of a

different character, would have been very simple of solution. How was he to see her again before leaving England? To call and ask for her, taking care, perhaps, to do so when Lord Littmass might be out? Nothing could be more natural, had he not happened to be in love with her. But, as it was, nothing could be more difficult. In the first place, he reflected, he had never since she was a mere child met her in her guardian's house. In the second, a formal visit to her alone could not but expose her to the surmises of the servants. He did not feel sure that a letter would reach her without going through Lord Littmass's hands; and he recoiled from anything resembling an organised attempt at secrecy.

At length, he bethought him of Dame Partridge, as one able and probably willing to help him. He had on the last occasion of his meeting Margaret in the Park, spoken of a book that he wished her to read. He would make the dame and the book minister to an interview. So, calling a day or two after the meeting with Mr Tresham, he asked for Lord Littmass. Lord Littmass, as James pretty strongly suspected, was not at home. Upon this he asked to see Dame Partridge, whereupon he was shown into a small back drawing-room, and presently the dame came to him, wearing her usual half-suppressed look of apprehension.

'Well, nurse,' he said, 'I am off on my travels again soon, and I am come to say good-bye to you and Miss Margaret. I should like to see her if she is at home. I want to give her a task to do while I am away, which will strengthen her mind, and improve her German.'

'And where, and for how long, may you be going this time, sir?' asked the dame, in her laconic way.

'Only to Mexico. I shall be back in five or six months.'

'And does his lordship send——I mean approve of your going to that wild, unhealthy country?'

'Certainly; it is partly in his interests that I am going. As to its being wild, you have no idea how much more agreeable a wild country is to me than a tame one, and it is not unhealthy in the parts I shall be most in.'

'Ah, sir, I was thinking of the people and the danger. I sometimes think you will be going away once too often.'

'Well, it is of little consequence to any one. One comfort of having neither parents nor friends, is the liberty it gives one to go and get killed wherever one chooses. If I were a married

man now——,' and here he broke off abruptly, and then, with a desperate effort, added,—

'Tell me, do you think I have any chance with Miss Margaret,—I mean, if I could get into an independent position, and could afford to marry, do you think she would care for me?'

'Does his lordship know of this, sir?'

'Not in the least. I wouldn't tell him on any account, until I am sure of herself, and have enough to live upon.'

The dame appeared relieved at hearing this, and said,—

'Pray, sir, keep to that decision. And, if I may be so bold, I would advise you to say nothing to Miss Margaret about it, at least until you come back. She is but a child in mind, and would not half understand you. She would, besides, in her innocence be very likely to betray it to Lord Littmass.'

'You think, then, that he would disapprove so very strongly?'

'It is impossible for me to say what his opinion might be, but if he were to disapprove, you would only be making yourself and her unhappy for nothing. His lordship always has his own way, sir.'

'Nurse, did you never discover, when I was a boy, that I managed to get my way, too, sometimes? Well, there is but one thing in the world that shall be an obstacle to my marrying Miss Waring, and that is herself. My love for her is such that if she will have me, all the guardians and Lord Littmasses in the world shall not come between to keep us apart. Go now and send her to me.'

'You don't mean, sir, to——'

'I mean to say good-bye. Go, there's a dear good nurse. You were always my friend as a boy, and you shall be so now.'

Abandoning further opposition, the dame went for Margaret, saying to herself,—

'He has all his lordship's imperiousness, when roused. If ever they do come to disagree, it will be terrible work between them.'

'I have brought you the German tale to make a careful translation of for me,' said James, as Margaret placed her thin, white hand in his. 'It will be rather a long task, but it will well repay you by its beauty. It is called "Aslauga's Knight," and is by La Motte Fouqué. I shall be glad to have your interpretation of its meaning, too, for, like Undine, and Cupid and Psyche, it is a bit of an enigma. Six months have to pass before we can meet again, for I am leaving Europe for about

that time. If you will write to me about it, or about yourself, I shall be glad indeed. I shall be grieved if our lives are to be altogether severed by my absence. Your goodwill and—and affection are very dear to me, Margaret. You little imagine how dear a woman can become to a man. I should like to teach you this, if I could do it without distressing you,' he continued, noting the placid yet kindly look with which she gazed upon him, and seeking in vain for any responsive tremor in the hand which he still held. 'I would not cause you a moment's pain in the world, but I must tell you that you have grown into my life, and become so much and so large a part of it, that it would make havoc and wreck of it were I forced to separate you from it.'

He paused for a moment, as if expecting her to speak, but seeing her silent and deeply attentive, he again continued,—

'It is often a woman's boast that she grants to compassion what love does not prompt; and it is as often her reward that love and happiness spring from obeying her kindly nature. Acting in blindness and in faith she at length opens her eyes in a new world, a world of light and confidence and joy;—unless, indeed, she give herself to a villain. I know, Margaret, that your hesitation does not arise from any distrust of me. It is rather the strangeness of the idea, and mistrust or ignorance of your own nature. I will not ask you to give me any definite answer now, beyond promising me this, that you will try to think of me as I think of you, and that you will do your best to grow into the woman worthy to be the wife of an honest and earnest man. Think, dear Margaret, what joy you will give me when you write and tell me that I may come back to claim you, and wear you as the crown of my life, my prompter and helper to all good ends. What say you?'

'You know, James,' she replied, gazing calmly and steadfastly upon him, 'that you have from me the gratitude, respect, and affection which I owe to you as my one friend who has ever taken any interest in me and taught me anything. What more I have to give that you can care for, I know not. It would be making a poor return to give you the trouble of taking care of me altogether, when Lord Littmass gives me up,' she added, with a gentle smile; 'and so burden you with a useless encumbrance when you have to fight your own way in the world.'

'Then you do not absolutely forbid me to hope? You will let me write to you, and you will write to me—' he exclaimed, with joyous eagerness. 'Oh, darling girl, you know not how

great a weight you lift from my heart, how black a cloud from my life. Now can I go forth among my fellow-men, and work and win my way to the fortune that is to free me from my bonds. Do you know that I have accepted a mission to Mexico solely because it gives me promise of the independence that I covet for your sake? Should I succeed, as I now feel that I must, I shall free your guardian from further trouble on your account, and you from further obligation to one who evidently cares not for you.'

'Do you know,' said Margaret, 'that it has never occurred to me to inquire on what terms Lord Littmass takes care of me, or in what relation I stand towards him. I do not know whether I am an expense to him, or, indeed, who I really am. What a thoughtless child I have always been! Since you spoke to me just now, a thick veil seems to have fallen from my sight. I am years older. Ah, what will my guardian say?'

As she uttered the question her faithful nurse entered the room, thinking, probably, that the leave-taking had lasted long enough, and hearing Margaret's words, said,—

'He will say nothing, my dear young lady, because he must know nothing. Whatever Mr James has said to you, you must keep safe in your own breast, even from me; or there may be sad trouble in store for us all. Now sir, you must go,—indeed.'

'I shall see you again before I leave England, if possible,' he said to Margaret. 'In the mean time, I shall live and work in hope.'

He took his departure, and Margaret followed her nurse back to their sitting-room in silence. Arrived there, she began turning over the pages of the German book Maynard had given her, the dame furtively watching her the while. Presently she looked up and said,—

'Nurse, is life a riddle to everybody?'

'Dear me, miss, why?'

'Tell me, is it?'

'Yes, dear child, it is, until—until—'

'Until when? they die?'

'No, until they learn to love.'

Margaret resumed her book. After a few more silent moments she said,—

'I suppose I am very stupid.'

'Dear heart, and why?'

'I don't seem to understand anything?'

'You are very young yet, miss.'

'Oh,' she said, musingly. 'At what age do people learn to love, and understand riddles?'

'Ah, dear child, it takes people at all ages, but some keep it off for a long time.'

'I do not think I am getting any nearer to that age. What do people do when they cannot learn the lesson?'

'What I hope some day to see you do; that is, to entrust yourself to the care of a good husband, who will teach you.'

'Mr Maynard wants me to marry him some day, when he has enough money to live without his fellowship. I am very fond of him and wish to see him happy, and making a great name in the world; but, do you know, nurse dear, that I cannot imagine myself doing as he wishes, or, indeed, ever marrying anybody. I suppose other people are not like me. Are they?'

'It would be well if many were like you, and could wait patiently to learn life's lessons without being so eager to anticipate them. It's a happy thing, miss, never to expect too much, and to be able to be content to do one's duty when the time comes.'

'Oh, if I had any duty, how I should enjoy doing it. Do you know that it seems to me that the more I disliked it, the more I should wish to do it, if I was only sure it was my duty. What do you think of my asking my guardian to set me some duty to do?'

It was a new idea to the dame that Margaret should venture to speak to Lord Littmass of her own accord. She had carefully avoided inculcating any fear of him, but at the same time had also carefully avoided encouraging any familiarity with him. So she said,—

'I think his lordship would be best pleased by your quietly pursuing your occupations, and improving yourself, and waiting patiently until some change occurs that requires his interference.'

'Do you think it would be any relief to him if I were to be married?'

'Any one who wants to marry you, must go to his lordship first, and obtain his consent.'

'Do you think Mr Maynard has done so?'

'I can't say, indeed. Probably not.'

'And what would my guardian say to him if he did?'

'Gentlefolks can't marry without money, and as Mr James would have no money but what he could earn, he could hardly go to his lordship and ask to be allowed to live on yours,—that is, if you have any?'

'Do you think I have?' asked Margaret, eagerly.

'It is impossible for me to say. Why do you want to know?'

'I should so like to give it to Mr Maynard. He would make so much better a use of it than I shall ever be able to.'

'Young ladies don't generally give their money away to gentlemen without giving themselves with it. Not that I mean to say there is any reason for you to suppose that you have any, independently of his lordship.'

'I wish I knew something about myself; what I have, who I am, and what I was made for.'

'All in good time. Such knowledge comes too soon for most of us who have to be our own providences. You may rest content in having a providence in your guardian, and a friend in Mr James, if anything happens to his lordship.'

'And in you too, nurse, dear; I don't know what I should ever do without you. There, I have three friends, I, who thought myself so lonely.'

CHAPTER XVII.

Lord Littmass on his return was informed by the servant that Mr Maynard had called and asked for him, and had said that he would call again before leaving town.

'Nothing more?'

'Only that finding your lordship was not within, he asked for Mrs Partridge.'

'Did he see her?'

'Yes, my lord.'

'Tell Mrs Partridge I wish to speak with her.'

Lord Littmass received his old retainer graciously, inquired what she thought of Miss Waring's health, and expressed satisfaction at her good report, said that his physician recommended

sea air for her, and ended by announcing that he had discovered a charming seaside cottage to which she was to go in two or three days attended by the dame.

'Has your lordship any further directions?'

'I wished also to inquire if your late husband's brother has shown any signs of relenting and doing justice by you.'

'He is dead, my lord, having left all his, or rather all my, property to a young wife whom he married a short time back. So that is gone for ever.'

'Very sad, and very hard. I am truly sorry for you. I must try and keep you with me still.'

'I am very grateful for all your lordship's kindness. I really do not know what I should do else.'

'Well, good afternoon; and I hope you will like your new residence.'

'Good-day, my lord;' and, much relieved, the dame turned to go.

'Oh, by the way,' said Lord Littmass, in a tone of indifference as she was leaving the room, 'did Mr Maynard give you any message for me?'

'No, my lord, he said he should call again before leaving London.'

'Ah, he is going away on another expedition. Now you and he have always been great friends. Tell me, do you think he will ever settle down quietly?'

'Never, till he takes a wife, my lord,' said the dame, hardily. 'That would break him of his wild habits. But I am told that gentlemen who have college fellowships are not allowed to marry.'

'Very true, my good dame, and therefore it would be a kindness to warn all young ladies to be on their guard against him. Indeed, I consider that all men who are similarly incapacitated ought not to go at large unless ticketed "ineligible."'

It was a rare event for Lord Littmass to gossip thus with the dame, and she was wondering what it betokened, when he asked,—

'And does Miss Margaret exhibit any symptoms of restlessness? She is growing into a woman now. Is she impatient to go into society? Does she manifest any preferences? Has she a liking for—for Mr Maynard, for instance?'

'Bless you, sir!' cried the old woman, now seeing his drift, and assuming a tone of simplicity as the best defence against

his subtle penetration; 'bless your lordship's heart, my young lady is but a child still for all her years; and as for society or marriage, she does not know the meaning of such words. Mr James was always good-natured to her, as he is to everybody, bless him, from childhood, lending her books and the like; and to-day, when he bid her good-bye, he gave her a long German lesson to do against his return. Of course she is grateful for any notice, seeing so few people as she does.'

'And he, you believe, thinks no more of her than that, or indeed of any other woman?'

'I can only judge by what I see and know of the characters of both of them; and I can't fancy Mr James ever giving up his liberty and settling down with a wife. But perhaps your lordship would be glad if they would think of each other in that way?' added the dame, with a sudden thought of surprising him into a revelation of his plans, and diverting his attention from her to himself.

On his part Lord Littmass considered that he would best secure her good offices by abstaining from pressing her, and appearing to take her into his confidence. So he said seriously, but gently and firmly,—

'You will do a real service to both of these young people, and to your old master too, dame, by discouraging any tendency whatever to matrimony on either side. Mr Maynard cannot possibly wed a delicate portionless girl; indeed I doubt if he can ever wed at all. Miss Waring is entirely dependent upon me, and I have almost more to do with my money than I can accomplish, without giving her a fortune. I could not allow her to go from my house a penniless bride. Were she to marry, therefore, I should have to reduce my establishment, and retain only my necessary personal attendants. Of course this confidence does not go beyond yourself, but you can act accordingly. Now go and prepare your young lady for her trip to the seaside, and tell her that I shall be glad to see her in the evening.'

The dame was shrewd enough to interpret this last speech as a threat of dismissal in the event of her master being thwarted in his wishes. All that she said to Margaret was to advise her to be perfectly frank and unembarrassed with her guardian, and avoid betraying James's secret, if possible, since there was no knowing how the knowledge of it might affect him with his lordship. But thus putting her on the defensive for Maynard's sake, the good dame knew that she was taking the

most effectual means to suppress any timidity that Margaret might have felt on her own account, and to put her on her mettle to ward off any injurious suspicion from her friend.

Lord Littmass received his ward in the evening with a marked kindness that set her entirely at her ease. He complimented her on her improving looks, spoke of the great hope he had that sea air and bathing would quite set her up, and how, after her health was restored and her education finished, he should begin to think of placing her in the world;—until Margaret thought that he must be the most careful and amiable of guardians. Then he went on to lift up a corner of the curtain of life, and give her a glimpse of the world and its ways. And Margaret listened half amused, half frightened, at the revelation of the drama in action around her, and thought that either her guardian must be the most cynical of men, or the world the most undesirable of places. A bystander would have perceived that Lord Littmass was artfully exhibiting a twofold picture to the girl's simple mind in order that, whatever her real character was, she might equally be influenced in the direction he desired. He told her of the supremacy of wealth and its triumph over all other considerations as the leading motive that swayed men and women alike. He enlarged upon the pleasures it conferred in ministering to ambition, love, science, art, and charity, drawing a vivid picture first of the delight of being able with open-handed generosity to minister to the needs of the less fortunate; and then of the sordid miseries of the poverty that blackens life, and closes perforce the intellect to all sense of beauty and truth, and the heart to all emotions of sympathy and benevolence.

Seeing Margaret listening, absorbed, to his eloquence, he went on to describe the struggles of men to ward off this dreadful fiend of poverty, and to achieve the blissful certainty of competence; and he told her how sad it was to see, as he had many and many a time seen, a man of genius on the point of success in his chosen career suddenly dragged down from his high hopes by a foolish yielding to the light impulses of love for some useless and portionless woman; and how much nobler it would have been for such man and such woman to deny themselves, and consult the dictates of prudence. And as Margaret listened, her thoughts naturally turned to the one man in whom she was interested, who sought her love, and of whose genius she had no doubt; and it occurred to her that she

might play this noble part, and refuse him for his own sake that which he sought from her, and so leave him to follow his career unburdened and unfettered.

This was her first thought, conceived under the impression that she was one of those same useless and portionless maidens whom Lord Littmass described as forming so dangerous a class. This was the end toward which her guardian was artfully leading her, for he could not look on her face without believing in the innate nobility of her disposition. But the first impression soon gave way to this other: 'Am I a portionless girl? and, if not, can I not help James, instead of hindering him?'

In revolving her idea, she lost something of the glowing discourse that was being pronounced for her edification. Her nurse's dictum against the propriety of giving her money without herself rose before her, and she rebelled against it. At length she determined to clear up her difficulty by appealing to Lord Littmass.

There was as yet no break in his discourse of which she could avail herself. She, therefore, resumed her listening. It seemed to her as if he read her thoughts, and was resolved to leave her no resource; for he went on to say,

'It is in the hopeful struggle with poverty that genius finds its best education, where the work brings its own legitimate reward as it progresses. The sudden accession to unearned wealth is apt to be almost as fatal to genius as the depressing effects of continued poverty. Yet the alliance between the ideal and the real, between genius and business, is of a nature so delicate and evanescent that, as in the charming allegory of Cupid and Psyche, repulsion and separation follow hard upon the introduction of too strong a light upon their union. Their most intimate relations must be held under a veil of obscurity; the artist never allowing his mind to be so withdrawn from the contemplation of his work as to behold in all its palpable reality the grosser reward of success. No: God and Mammon, the standard and the payment, will not be served at once. Tell me,' he added, quitting his abstract vein and addressing her personally; 'you have acquired considerable skill in painting. Can you imagine yourself working as well if you were thinking all the time of the money you were to get for your picture, as if you were labouring earnestly, and with a single eye to the truth or beauty of your idea, and the faithfulness of your representation?'

'Oh, no, indeed,' cried Margaret; 'and yet, I think that if I were compelled to paint in order to earn money for those I loved, the thought of their need would make me work much harder and better than if I were a mere dilettante.'

'Harder, possibly; but not better, in the highest sense. In such case quality would have to defer to quantity. But I was speaking of the efforts of genius to manifest itself to mankind, and enrich the world with the fruits of its inspiration. An artist looking only to his pay will, perforce, consult the taste and culture of his audience, and lower his representation to be in accordance with their condition of mind, rather than maintain his own standard of excellence.'

'Oh, yes, I see now your meaning,' cried Margaret, carried away by the eagerness of her comprehension, and forgetting altogether the augustness of her monitor's presence. 'It is the way in which things appear to him that the artist is expected to portray, not merely that in which they appear to the commonplace view. To do any good work one must be free from any bias that may distort the vision. This must be one reason why, as you say, we cannot serve God and Mammon. And the other, that the possession of wealth is likely to overlay the soul, and dull its apprehension of beauty or truth.'

'I am glad to find that you comprehend me so perfectly.'

'Pray, Lord Littmass, have I any wealth?'

'You! Why?'

'Because, if I have, I should so like to give it, or some of it, to Mr Maynard, to enable him to pursue his single path to usefulness and fame, without his being obliged to think about the mean end of money.'

And having at last hazarded her shot, the fair girl sat trembling and frightened, doubting whether she had committed some enormity in her guardian's eyes.

'You have a great regard for that gentleman?' he inquired, looking penetratingly at her.

'He has always been my good and kind friend,' she answered, plucking up her courage anew on finding no storm descending upon her; 'and he deserves all the gratitude that I can show him. Besides——'

'Besides what? Do not fear to tell me.'

'I think and hope that if he felt himself at ease about money, he would not be going away to wild countries to earn

it, but would follow his studies at home, and be content to regard me as his child-friend, as he has always done.'

'Perhaps he thinks you are outgrowing such a position, and he would promote you to something more. What do you think about it?'

'I honour and respect him very much, but would rather remain always as I am, if I could be of service to him without changing. But I am so ignorant of everything. I do not even know whether I have anything of my own, or am dependent on your bounty for the means of living.'

'So that if you had money you would give it to him, and remain your own mistress?'

'Oh, yes, that I would, indeed.'

'My child, you have nothing but what I may be able to give you some day. He has enough to enable any reasonable man to follow his bent. You need not fear on his account. Neither need you fear for yourself. No one shall carry you off against your will.'

Thus spake Lord Littmass, perceiving that his wisdom had overreached itself, being defective in respect of its omission to take into account that sweet perversity of the womanly heart which makes pity the shortest cut to the affections, and self-sacrifice for a friend a positive delight. Wishing to excite her to covet wealth for herself, and despise Maynard for his poverty, he had led her to covet wealth for him and despise it for herself, even to sacrificing her own prospects to that end. Desirous now to withdraw her from dwelling upon any disappointment she might feel at finding her fair scheme blighted, Lord Littmass hastened to bring her attention back to herself, and so asked,—

'Do you detect any new ambitions or desires springing up in yourself since you came home and health began to glow in your veins, that may indicate the turn you may wish your life to take in the future?'

'My future life!' asked Margaret, with a start. 'I have never had a thought beyond the present. I suppose I am very odd and foolish. Indeed the nuns in France used to tell me so; but I have never been conscious of any other wish than to serve God by making all the beauty possible to me by means of Art, and Music, and Worship, believing that I had but a short time to live, and that I should thus best fulfil my duty. But

the little I have seen since I have come home to England has convinced me that there is more ugliness of life to be banished than can be got at by any art I have known, or any prayers I have prayed. If you would only tell me some duty I may set about at once, I shall be so grateful. Being good serves none, or at most, one. Show me any way of doing good, and I shall wish to live and to toil.'

For one reason, at least, the natural animation and freedom with which she spoke, gratified her guardian exceedingly, for it proved to him that he had played his part to perfection in the winning of her confidence. And as the consciousness of the wide interval between their respective moral natures rose vividly before him, exhibiting him to himself very much in the light of a wily demon confessing a simple and unsuspecting angel, he smiled complacently upon his achievement, and warmed towards the unconscious instrument of his gratification.

'Were you strong, and robust, and some years older,' he said, 'many courses would be open to you that might lead you in the path which your enthusiasm inclines you to tread. But my first care is for your health and education. My second for your fitting establishment in life. After a few months by the sea you will return hither, I hope, a new creature in body. In the mean time, it is my wish that you should pursue the means of culture you have hitherto followed, and perfect yourself as well as may be in music, painting, and languages. If masters are procurable where you will be staying, you shall have them. Every faculty cultivated becomes part of our life's outfit, and is often available for our service when least anticipated. You may retire now, trusting all to me. In a very few days you will be accompanied by Mrs Partridge to the coast.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

James Maynard breakfasted next morning with Lord Littmass by express invitation. Margaret was not present, and the conversation turned towards the Mexican scheme. He had dined the previous evening with Mr Tresham, and everything was in fair train for carrying out the enterprise. Lord Litt-

mass obtained from him the main particulars of the evening's conversation, and then drew him out on the subject of his recent visit to South America. He was contemplating laying a portion of the scene of his new novel in that region, and he knew well how to avail himself of the information gathered by the observing minds of others, to elaborate from it a picture of life, manners, and scenery, so vivid and truthful as to make even those who had been in the country itself, take it for granted that the author must have long lived there. In descriptive and narrative conversation James excelled. He had seen, studied, and learnt so much at home, that he knew how and what to observe when abroad. Lord Littmass even complimented him on the possession of this faculty; and James said in acknowledgment that travel was useful only to those who had studied, for that to the ignorant and careless all countries are alike.

'Young men,' he said, 'are constantly being sent abroad to enlarge their minds, without knowing enough of their own country to enable them to discern the significance either of likeness or of difference. I once came across a young English nobleman who did nothing but abuse the people and the country for being different from what he had been accustomed to at home. Being among Spaniards his criticisms were endured with civility; but had he behaved in the same manner among Americans, especially in the West, he would soon have had a knife or a bullet put into him. Hood describes such an individual, as truly as he does most things, when he says,—

'"Alas,
Some minds improve by travel, others rather
Resemble copper wire, or brass,
That gets the narrower by going farther."'

'Speaking of minds improving,' said Lord Littmass, after a short pause, 'I wish I could think that my ward, Miss Waring, had been benefited by her residence abroad. Fragile as she ever was, both in mind and body, she has come back more of a skeleton than of a woman, and a complete child in intellect. A thousand pities for a girl with her prepossessing face and fine prospects.'

He said this as if the matter really weighed upon his own mind, but could not have the smallest interest for his hearer.

'Miss Waring of weak mind and fine prospects!' ejaculated Maynard, before he could stop himself, so unawares was he

taken by his wily host. 'Surely the epithets might change places with each other.'

'Ah, you have seen her recently. Do you think she has improved under English air? I almost fear that such colour as she sometimes has is rather hectic than healthy. At one time I rather looked forward to her making a sensation when I should introduce her into society. Her face, voice, and expectations would have enabled her to make a grand match. But some fatal delicacy seems to have smitten her, and made her unfit for the world, even if her life is preserved. Of course what I allude to has not escaped your observation?'

'I have seen nothing of the kind,' answered James. 'Her mind, though unequally developed, owing to the irregularity of her education, and the lack of youthful companionship, is as sound and healthy as that of any person breathing, and I believe and trust that her constitution is the same.'

'You quite raise my hopes,' said Lord Littmass, in a somewhat frigid tone that ill accorded with his words. 'And if it be really as you think, I may yet anticipate a bright future for her. When are you leaving town?'

'At once, but I intend to return before finally starting for Mexico,' answered James, his heart sinking, and all the glow gone from his cherished picture of the future.

'Margaret an heiress!' repeated Maynard to himself as he proceeded on his way. 'This is indeed a blow to my hopes. Her wealth makes an infinitely greater gap between us than my poverty. How this haughty lord would scoff at my presumption, if he knew what had passed! A strange circumstance, too, that the first and only time he has ever referred to her in my presence, it should be to inflict this crushing blow. Is it mere coincidence? Was it a chance remark? He knows that we have met of late; that I am a man, and she almost a woman, and a lovely one too; and that men and women when young are very apt to become attached to each other. Perhaps he only intended to put me on my guard; to intimate in the most delicate manner that any addresses from me will be vain. Or, can he have any idea of the fact, and without betraying his information, be seeking to outmanœuvre me? Can the dame or Margaret herself have given any hint? I will write from Oxford, and ask the old woman; and also what Margaret's prospects really are.'

This is what he wrote from Oxford.

'My dear old Nurse,

'Please keep this to yourself, and send me at once a few lines in answer. Lord Littmass intimated to me that Miss Margaret is a great heiress, and consequently far beyond my reach. Can you tell me the facts, that I may not make a fool of myself in the dark.

'Also, can Lord L. have any idea of my attachment?

'Yours affectionately,

'J. M.'

'Several days passed, and James Maynard received no answer. This delay caused him much anxiety. Could his note by any chance have got into Lord Littmass's hands? Of course letters for the servants generally went straight to them; but, he remembered now, something had been said about a visit to the coast, and a letter to the dame might be referred to the master for re-direction. If so, the Oxford postmark and the handwriting would excite his curiosity, and he might detain or destroy the letter, or make the dame tell him its contents.

At length the delay was explained by the answer, which was as follows:—

'Cove Cottage, Porlock, North Devon.

'Dear Sir,

'Your letter has just reached me. His lordship is very penetrating, but he cannot know anything of what you ask. My young lady's prospects depend entirely upon him. He is not rich, as people suppose. If there is any condescension it will be on your part. Pray destroy this note. This is a very retired place, close by the sea. My young lady is delighted with it, and bathes daily. She has already begun the German task which you gave her.

'Yours respectfully, and obediently,

'Jane Partridge.'

The reconciliation of the two statements respecting Margaret's 'prospects' was a problem that James confessed himself unable to solve. Combining all the statements made on the subject, it would appear that she had nothing of her own, that Lord Littmass intended her to be his heiress, and that he had little to bestow upon her; a combination which by no means

bore out the 'fine prospects,' of which her guardian had spoken to James.

Again, what could be the old woman's meaning by 'the condescension being on his part?' Who could he be, and who Margaret? These were questions to which he had never cared to find answers. Now, a solution readily presented itself. Margaret must be an illegitimate daughter of Lord Littmass, and he was her superior in virtue of such birth. The dame, he well knew, was the last person to speak at random, or to make a positive assertion without ample justification. The curt and sententious style of her note showed him that it cost her a considerable effort to prevail upon herself to tell him so much, and that it was not without a considerable misgiving lest her regard for him was leading her to exceed her duty.

Amid all his perplexity one course alone stood out before him as meeting most of the practical and the sentimental emergencies. This was, to appeal point-blank to Lord Littmass, who, as the guardian of them both, was entitled to this consideration, and to ask for his sanction to their engagement. Yet, what was the use? His answer could only be of one kind. Had he not, indeed, already given an answer in anticipation?

'Ah!' cried James, wincing, as the thought struck him like a sudden shot. 'I see it all. He has purposely put it out of my power as an honourable man, to make any advances towards Margaret, by telling me that she is rich, while I am a pauper. No good, then, asking his permission until I have gained my independence. He would make me contemptible in her eyes by representing me as seeking her for her wealth, and withdrawing her from the position which she has a right to claim. And if she, indeed, stand in the relation to him which seems most probable, he will doubly resent, as an instance of ingratitude, the thwarting of his plans by me. Margaret is in seclusion. There is no one to make her forget me. I will not seek her again before I leave England, but write a few lines of farewell and hope. And then to work! Who knows but that this expedition may lead to fortune? The Spaniards did not rob Mexico of all its gold and silver. I may do a good thing for myself as well as for the Company. But in enriching Lord Littmass I shall but widen the gulf that separates me from Margaret! No matter. Perhaps he will be duly grateful, and she at least will know that I sought her, believing her to be poorer than myself, and that I sought wealth only for her sake; and, when rich, I will present

myself to Lord Littmass and demand her. To work! then, to work! and this time to work that will pay, pay in coin, not in honour merely, or barren self-culture.'

CHAPTER XIX.

In his newly-born enthusiasm of money-making, James Maynard commenced his preparations for his enterprise. These consisted in perfecting his acquaintance with the technical Spanish legal and mining phraseology; in learning the newest methods of assaying and testing ores; and all the details of draining, extracting, crushing, and refining. He was a man who did nothing by halves. He would entrust nothing to other hands, but would qualify himself to do everything that his mission involved beyond mere brute labour. Finding that he had ample time for these varied tasks, inasmuch as a great deal of what he had to learn was to be obtained from books, and could be done on the voyage, he determined to complete his South American notes and offer them to some publisher. This, he considered, would be recreation in the midst of his other labours, for he was still at that age when a man fancies that he finds rest by changing his occupation from one kind of mental work to another; not having yet discovered that the brain will not long consent to be thus cheated of its due supply of repose and fresh blood. Sixteen hours a day of close application for several weeks together had only once as yet begun to tell upon his highly nervous frame. He had got over the effects of that excess on his last voyage to Brazil, and he feared not now to devote the remainder of his time in England to labour equally severe, save that it involved a good deal of open-air work and exercise.

Ever a student of the abstrusest problems of antiquity, he had been excited by some remains which he had come upon in one of his rides across the Pampas of the Cordilleras, to institute a comparison between them and the monuments of Salisbury Plain. He had made valuable notes respecting the sun-worship of the Incas, as exhibited in the temples they had erected, and which survived the ravages of their Spanish conquerors. He

had discovered ample indications of the use of the cross among races severed from time immemorial, perhaps for ever, from intercourse with the rest of mankind,—where rode in the nightly sky above them the starry effigy of the symbol revered throughout Christendom. He had reason to believe that he would find a counterpart of these things in the remains of the Druids, and derive therefrom an argument bearing on the original identity of races or of worships. So he determined to take his books and instruments, and sojourn awhile at Salisbury, where he could follow his antiquarian researches in the intervals of his other labours.

His work might lead to substantial profit, and, besides, was not Margaret in Devonshire, and would he not, at Salisbury, be half-way on the road towards her?

CHAPTER XX.

James Maynard was one in whom, throughout his youth, the supremacy of the intellect had ever been undisturbed by any intrusion of the affections. Love attacks most men early, and recurs with gradually increasing intensity, until some special assault succeeds in establishing its sway and dominating the remainder of their lives. He had grown up ignorant even of the ordinary ties of domestic affection, and had passed through his school and college days without contracting any friendships of sufficient strength to influence his career. For Woman he had a kind of general admiration, and held that men sought her society because the difference of their natures enabled her to give her sympathy unmingled with any sentiment of rivalry; whereas men could scarcely help feeling a degree of envy of each other's achievements. But as for falling in love, he thought that if ever he should do that it would be with a steam-engine, a description of being for which he entertained the highest admiration, regarding it as the most beautiful and charming creature in the world, inasmuch as it combined the greatest amount of power with the highest degree of docility. For, as he used to discourse to the knot of college friends, who delighted to gather in his curiously decorated rooms, and listen to his descriptions of his wanderings:—

'It is all very well to say that men and women are what they are made by each other. This kind of action and re-action has been going on ever since the world began, and mankind has made but little progress under it. But see what the action and re-action of man and the steam-engine is doing for us! I don't mean as to manufactures and the conveniences of life merely. It is as the locomotive that steam is the greatest revolutioniser. The world of the future, the new heaven and new earth, dates from a twofold parent, not man and woman, but man and steam. The ideas engendered of these are the faith and science of the future. So nourished and so reared, human sympathies will grow with human knowledge, the human heart with the human head, until all exclusive sympathy of cloister or hearth alike vanish in a universal many-sidedness; and the whole past be melted and fused together, and recast in a fresh mould for the future service of mankind! But the period before the first day will, as of old, seem but a chaos to those who come after. Perhaps to many of the dwellers therein who fail to discern the signs of their times.'

Now, when love did at length overtake Maynard, it took complete possession of him, and diffused itself throughout his whole being, compelling him, after the agonies of his first struggle, to regard everything from a new point of view. It affected his science, his faith, and his practice, and forced him to bend his whole powers eagerly towards attaining its fulfilment. No misgiving as to mutuality of fitness troubled him for a moment; for his love was a furnace in which all angularities would be dissolved, all differences combined. It was a triumph to him to find himself able to bend his intellect once more to his work, and to be aided therein by the newly-born hope of a happy issue. A vast improvement this, he now deemed it, on the desultory, abstract, impersonal aims of his previous existence.

Arrived at the scene of his labours, he hired a small lodging, and set himself to work at his various tasks. The mornings, from a very early hour, were devoted to the matters connected with his coming expedition. The afternoons and evenings to measurements and calculations, topographical and astronomical, at Stonehenge. The brisk seven miles' walk to and from Salisbury, the return home being often deferred until night and the stars were over all, did something towards resting and renovating the scholar's brain; and James thoroughly enjoyed the

time thus spent. For now he had a supreme object and hope to animate and pre-occupy him,—a future with Margaret, nourished by the affection and sympathy of her pure and lofty soul; and tending, in his turn, the growth of her clear, eager intelligence:—these made an ideal of happiness which had come to form part of his very self, until he felt that to have to give her up would be to extinguish all the light of his life. It was true that he did not know for certain that she loved him; or that, even if she did, she could ever marry him. The origin and future destiny of both were equally hidden in obscurity; but he vowed a vow that none should come between and tear her from him.

It was one evening, at the termination of his sojourn, that exultation at the completion of his work, stimulated perhaps by the heat of the sun, in which he had been toiling for several hours, brought on a condition of alternate exaltation and depression. In order to take a final survey of the magic circle of huge stones which compose the remains, he had, by means of a rope fastened at one end and thrown over the top, managed to mount to the summit of the tallest trilithon, that which, standing hard by the altar-stone, has doubtless witnessed many a solemn and terrible sacrifice to the ruthless gods of old. Here he sat meditating, until the after-glow of a glorious sunset arrested his gaze. He watched the slow changes of the sky until they ceased in grey. The dews of evening fell on his uncovered head; and the stars came thickly out as twilight gave place to darkness. Absorbed in reveries in which the remotest part of man's history mingled with visions of his own future, he was unconscious both of the approach of the carriage that had stopped beyond the outer ring of stones, and of the advancing steps of its late inmate. He was unconscious of all without, until the bright gleaming of a meteor that darted across the sky and vanished in darkness, recalled him to himself; recalled him to the possibility of the fall of his own happiness being prefigured by the fall of yon star from its place of brightness. And in the intensity of his realisation of the blackness of darkness that awaited him in such case, he suddenly stood erect on his perilous elevation, and there, hand clenched and face upturned towards the glistening sky, swore to God that not even He nor Death should tear her from him;—when he perceived in the starlit gloom beneath him, at a short distance from the base of his pedestal, a form that was strange in-

deed seen there and at such a time, but yet a form that was familiar to him.

The sight of Lord Littmass recalled him to himself and to the practical world. Now was the time for striking the heated iron. Now would his excited energies mould all opposition according to his wishes. His secret, declared as it had just been to heaven, he would not shrink from telling also to man, even to the man whose hands held the clues of his fate and of hers who alone was dear to him. It might theoretically, and to cold calculation, be folly and madness thus to precipitate events, and to exhibit, as it were, his hand prematurely to his antagonist but the highest wisdom lay sometimes in yielding to the moment's burning inspiration, and in disregarding the dictates of mere prudence. The man and the purpose had been present before, here now were the opportunity and the mood.

Thus thought James while silence still prevailed, and no utterance of Lord Littmass had shown that he recognised him, or broken the spell that was on him.

'One moment, my lord, and I will be with you,' said Maynard, preparing to descend by his rope.

Lord Littmass waited in silence until he approached, and then said, in a cheerful tone,—

'I am just in time, I find, to give you a lift back to Salisbury. I called at your lodgings on my way back from Devonshire, and heard that you were likely to be here. I had often wished to visit the Druids' famous haunt, and so have come out to meet you. I would not bring the carriage into the charmed circle.'

The sound of his guardian's voice dispelled Maynard's dream. The very coolness of his tones communicated itself to his fervid feelings, and rapidly reduced his glowing mood to its normal temperature. He perceived that it was necessary for both sides to be under the influence of the excitement that had just dominated him, in order to produce that condition of *rapport* in which alone mutual sympathy and comprehension are possible. He had thought, at the first glimpse of Lord Littmass, that his adjuration must have been overheard and its import apprehended, and that, therefore, the ground was prepared for his appeal. The unconcern manifested in the voice and address of his visitant put this idea to flight; and Maynard presently rejoiced thereat; rejoiced that he had not betrayed himself before the time which he had deliberately fixed upon.

He little dreamed that his astute guardian had heard every word, and perfectly understood the purport thereof, and was now about carefully to lead the conversation into a channel where he could, without apparent design, attempt to withdraw him from his infatuation, and deal a death-blow to his hopes.

'This must be the best of all times for a visit here, when the vastness of the stones is enhanced by the twilight that lingers on their summits, and their bases are hidden in gloom. By-the-by, they must make somewhat dangerous perches. I see several have already fallen. I wish, however, that I were young enough to imitate your example, and climb up to see the night settling down upon the plain. A variety of fancies came into my head when I caught sight of your figure against the sky. You might have been posing for a statue of Satan defying the sun, though he would scarcely have committed the enormity of menacing the evening star! or Ajax praying for light; or, better still perhaps, a fire-worshipper of old Chaldæa bidding farewell to the departing god, and imploring his return on the morrow. The most rational of all worships, methinks, that stop short of a First Cause; for certainly the sun is the god of our system, by which all things live and move and have their being. And if people want an "express image" to worship, they can nowhere find a nobler,—though the students who dwell in owl's light don't see enough of its glories to know that. Perhaps you have turned Zoroastrian;—by the way, were the Druids sun-worshippers?—and my next guess is the right one. You have finished your work, and were returning thanks to the giver of light?'

'I have finished my work, and am now at your lordship's service,' said James, lifting the bundle of papers and implements which he had been putting together during these observations. 'The carriage is on the side next the town?'

'Yes, but I really cannot tell in which direction that is; it has become so dark.'

'There is the north star, and the town lies nearly south, so that we shall find it this way,' said James, walking on with his load.

Lord Littmass followed, and as they drove back towards Salisbury, Maynard, who had finally made up his mind to adhere to his plan of saying nothing about Margaret until the time should come when he could claim her on the strength of his own independence, gradually returned to his old cordial relations

with his guardian, and talked unreservedly of the progress he had made with his preparations for his enterprise, and his reasons for selecting Salisbury for his head-quarters during the interval.

'Surely the happiest of lives,' said Lord Littmass, 'is that of the student whose position accords with his ambitions. Without care for the means of living, or wealth to tempt him to luxury and idleness; without the distraction of exacting friends or inconsiderate acquaintances; above all, without wife or children to harass him by anxieties for their health or their welfare, —he can pursue the way of knowledge and usefulness in light marching order, the envy of his heavily-weighted fellows, and the real lever that moves the world. None but those who, whether married or single, have lived in society, can tell the debasing effect produced upon the mind by the innumerable little meannesses which spring inevitably from a daily contact with individuals. Life becomes an agglomeration of small personalities, amid which individual character is merged, and all larger aims are impossible. With poverty there is anxiety and sordidness. With wealth, distraction and frivolity. Isolation is the parent of intellect; solitude the nurse of thought. Now, I dare say that you have not spoken to a soul since you have been here, and have not cared to do so. You have been absorbed in your work, and you and your work have been the better for it.'

'Well, I am not quite a Trappist,' said James; 'but, on the contrary, am always glad to talk with people who have any special knowledge or gift. Many a chat have I had with the blacksmith, who has his forge in yonder shanty, and I fancy we have each learned something from the other that may be useful some day.'

'Such converse is not within my meaning, for it entails no responsibility. It is to such intimacies as involve men's hearts and lives, and fritter away their time, their brains, and their money, or its equivalent, that I refer. Intimacies which at first bid fair to crown us with all delight for ever, and then, whether through mistaken estimate of character, dissimilarity of temperament, antagonism of interests, or any other cause, turn to gall and bitterness, and make us curse the day when we placed our freedom as a hostage in fortune's hands.'

Owing either to the re-action from his recent mood, or the refreshment of the cool night air, as the open carriage rolled

over the dark plain, or to the circumstance of their being, not in Lord Littmass's house, where Lord Littmass was king, but as equals in a place where the younger was more at home of the two, James felt more at his ease than he had ever before been with his guardian. In answer to his last remarks he retorted with vivacity,—

'And yet, methinks, your lordship has not very rigidly adhered to this unsociable rule yourself; for, instead of having such desirable immunity from care to enable you to follow your favourite pursuits, your life has been for years burdened with responsibilities which must have given you considerable occupation and harassment. No; admirable in principle as such quietism may appear, there is yet a flaw in the theory which makes its practice impossible. *Men and women are not made so.* They have affections as well as intellects, and which are quite as potent and exacting. And it is hard to say that mankind does not gain as much by the exercise of the one as of the other. Ignore the affections, and the glory of literature would vanish. Could a monk legislate, or write history, knowing nothing of the passions which, by swaying mankind, necessitate laws, and produce history? Where would art be, where religion, ay, or even science, if brain without heart ruled the day? I fancy I have learned something on this head from the schoolmen, who in their definitions of the Infinite omit altogether the finite, and aim at attaining to a comprehension of the whole while ignoring the parts. As I read the world, the age that placed imagination above facts and dispensed with proof, has past, and after it go all the miseries that superstition has wrought to man. Henceforth, no inferences are sound save those which take account of all phenomena, including those which appertain to the human affections.'

'There is still a savour of the parson, if not of the priest, in you,' said Lord Littmas, somewhat coldly. 'Do you intend to preach such doctrine, when the retention of your fellowship necessitates your taking orders?'

'I shall never be in a position to preach,' returned James; 'I know too little myself. But let us stop here a moment, and I will show you the kind of sermons I should like to hear preached.'

They had reached the smithy which James had before referred to. Stopping the carriage, he jumped out, and tapped at the door. It was opened by a woman who looked distrustfully

out into the darkness. She was soon re-assured by James's cheerful voice, saying,—

'Well, Mrs Mason, and how is your husband to-night? I am come to say good-bye. Has he turned in yet?'

'Oh, sir, is it you, and are you leaving these parts? My man is asleep now. He was but poorly this evening, and I don't like to rouse him. He will be vexed indeed not to see you again. And so shall I, for I can never thank you enough. You have made a new man of him, and a new life for me and mine.'

'Well, I won't come in, then, but go away wishing you well, and that it may last. Here is what I promised to bring you. Keep it against another rainy day. Remember me to Mason. Good-bye.'

'This poor fellow,' said James to Lord Littmass, as they resumed their route, 'was one of the most contentious demagogues and infidels I ever met. I had had two or three talks with him when he was laid up by a kick from a horse that he was shoeing. My difficulty had been to convince him that he did not know quite enough just yet to reform the world either in politics or in religion. And the example came in handily to enable me to show him that it was not likely he should, since he couldn't even follow his own trade, which he had worked at all his life, without getting bowled over by one of the very creatures he knew most about. That rather bothered him, and I got him to promise to read a small volume, containing selections from the four Gospels, for he was as ignorant as a horse about many things he had been in the habit of declaiming most loudly against. Next time I called, he referred to the book and asked whether it was all plain sailing to me. I said, "No, of course not; but what was it that had been puzzling him?" He said he should be glad to know what I understood by Christianity. I asked what he had read last. He pointed to the parable of the Prodigal Son. "Do you mean that you do not like the elder brother?" I asked. He said he was just one of your regular hypocritical respectabilities, and abused him and his kind in terms which I need not repeat. When he had done, I said, "Exactly so. Now we get to my idea of Christianity. Suppose that elder brother to have left his comfortable home, and gone out into the wilderness to seek and save his lost younger brother, and I should say that he was a fair example of what a Christian should be." My friend was completely dumbfounder-

ed for a moment, and then, in unconscious imitation of Lessing, said, " Well, sir, if that be the meaning of it, it's a great pity people don't give up religion and try Christianity." From that moment his whole character has been revolutionised, as you may gather from the woman's remark. Here we are, near home. Will you come to my lodgings, and have such supper as my landlady can give us, or will you be set down at the hotel ? '

' Thank you, I will go to the hotel, but shall be glad to see you at breakfast to-morrow. I hope you will be ready in time to accompany me to London afterwards. I can give you a bed for the rest of your stay in England.'

The offer was made in a way that implied an expectation of its acceptance, and as James saw no reason to decline it, he did accept it, little thinking, however, that it sprang from Lord Littmass's desire to keep him in sight until he should sail for Mexico, and deprive him of any chance of going nearer to Margaret's neighbourhood. James's sentiments, domestic and religious, had revived his alarm, for he thought they denoted an inclination both towards matrimony and towards a cure of souls, which, under the designation of a college living, is the usual mode of exit from a state of collegiate celibacy.

CHAPTER XXI.

Longing for some assurance of Margaret's regard to comfort and sustain him in his absence, Maynard again had recourse to Dame Partridge as a medium of communication. His note to her, and letter to Margaret, brought him the following replies on the eve of his departure :—

' Dear Sir,

' Pray be content with this one writing, and do not ask for another. I cannot tell you why, but duty and prudence forbid me to do as you wish. My young lady is nicely. Time and patience alone can help.

' Yours respectfully and obediently,

' Jane Partridge.'

The other, signed simply 'M.,' ran thus:—

'I knew not before how much I loved the sea. It is the only friend I have to converse with here. I bathe in it, and sing to it, and read my translations aloud to it, sitting on a jutting point of rock. Thank you so much for the task. I have glanced over the story, and found it delightful. It deserves my choicest English. My best wishes and grateful regards go with you to Mexico. Happily returned, you shall find my task accomplished.'

James did not tell Margaret of his deeper purpose in the selection he had made, and that he trusted, by means of the intensely refined sentimentalism of 'Aslauga's Knight,' to convert her abstract affectionateness into a concrete personal attachment. His idea was, that the spectacle of the true knight wearing life away in devotion to the dead ideal of an historical mistress could scarcely fail to excite in her a desire to possess a devoted knight of her own, and to reward his worship with the more solid solace of her real and living self.

Three letters which came from Maynard about four months after his departure, contain as much of the history of his expedition as it is necessary to give, before we return to the party at Linnwood Manor.

'Near Guanaxuato, Mexico.

'I believe, dear Margaret, you never in your life have looked to the future, but were always content with a present which allowed you to dream about the past. It used to be much the same with me. Absorbed in the historical, the scientific, the philosophical, or the abstract, the future always had for me an ideal instead of a real significance. It was a poem to be read, rather than a fact to be enacted. You have thanked me for what I taught you. Will you be very much surprised to be told, that you have taught me far more than I you? Yet I fear that such is indeed the case. A knowledge, too, none the less important in that you did not intend to impart it, and were utterly unconscious even of having it in your power to do so. It is good for you to exercise your mind in thinking rather than in reverie, so I leave you this enigma to ponder.

'I wish I could have seen you in your sea-side retreat, so as to have the picture of your surroundings as well as of yourself

in my mind. I had a surprise shortly before I sailed. I was at Stonehenge, having gone there about some of those old theories of mine I used to inflict upon you in our long talks. I was in the dark, on the top of one of the big stones, and Lord Littmass suddenly appeared to me. He was returning to London, I fancy from seeing you. But he did not tell me anything of you. He never spoke to me of you but once, and then he said what I hoped might turn out a mistake, for it wounded my selfishness. Even affection is selfish sometimes. He implied that there is a barrier between us which wealth alone can surmount. It is in the hope of getting over that barrier that I have crossed the Atlantic again, and climbed the Sierra Madre of Mexico. Throughout my six weeks upon the sea it ever seemed as if you were near to me, for the same element held us both, and formed a chain of sympathy. So vivid at times was the feeling, that I could not help fancying you to be bathing, and that water had become for the nonce a good conductor!

'Once ashore, and toiling through the burning lands which are well called *Tierras Calientes*, you seemed to retreat from me bodily, but only to diffuse yourself over my whole idea of things. I found myself inquiring the best season for making such a journey, thinking it would never do for you at the time I made it. As I mounted towards the high table lands, which alone are really habitable, I inquired,—again for your sake!—if there were no easier route: and learning that the capital city of Mexico is approachable only by the wretchedest roads, I found myself devising an improvement on the litters here in use, so that you might be gently transported to these heights. Then, when the shocks of an earthquake frightened the inhabitants out into the streets, I thought how easily I could construct for you a little dwelling of wood and iron that should be quite earthquake-proof. The people here have done something to diminish the danger by building mainly on the ground, but I could improve upon them if you were here to make it worth while. Thus, already are you in anticipation the founder of a new order of architecture!

'As I looked down into the *barrancas*, as the deep wooded hollows of these vast plateaux are called, and then up to the snowy peaks in the distance, I thought that though the natives may like to bury themselves in those fertile but stifling recesses,

the free airs and wide outlook of the loftier regions would better suit your Teutonic nature.

'In Mexico city itself I found much to admire. It has a captivating exterior, and is by no means devoid of such comforts as I never before thought to care about, but now covet as necessary for you; supposing, of course, anything should ever occur to induce you to travel hither. Unluckily it is subject to swamps, being built on a lower level than is sometimes attained by the neighbouring lakes, whose water is apt to percolate through into the city.

'While there, I had much work consulting lawyers and examining legal documents. Then there were mining agents to be dealt with, and lastly, the authorities, who were profuse in verbal civilities, assuring me, after the manner of Spaniards, which some admire, but which I detest as being grossly insincere, and wasting so many words, that the whole country was mine, but at the same time endeavoured to plunder me liberally by their exactions.

'What interested me most, I think, next to the ancient remains, was the sight of the President, whose acquaintance I was so fortunate as to make. If you can imagine a Hindoo Governor-General of India, a red Indian President of the United States, a Maori Governor of New Zealand, or a 'black fellow' of Australia, you will understand the feeling excited by Juarez, a full-blooded aboriginal Indian, whose race has survived the whole series of Mexican conquests, Olmec and Toltec, Aztec and Spanish, being President of the country, in preference to any Spaniard. Not that he was elected to his present dignity. He was judge of the supreme court; and only succeeded on the death of the President and Vice-President.

'After getting matters in a proper train, I started with an armed escort for the place of my destination. It went much against the grain with me to have this guard. I have always got on very well when left to my own resources among savages; but the Mexicans are not savage enough for that, and I was assured that it was absolutely necessary as a protection against the brigands, who infest the country in spite of all the Government can do.

'My journey up here lay through some noble scenery, amid which the snowy peak of *Iztaccihuatl*, or 'white woman,' appeared as conspicuously as did in my imagination a certain

fair damsel of my acquaintance, who, among the people out here, would indeed be reckoned the fairest of white women.

Well, to conclude, before I quite tire you. My task is, for the present, well nigh finished, and, I am rejoiced to say, augurs most favourably. I shan't trouble you with particulars. Those may be reserved for Lord Littmass and my employers. But I think there is little doubt but that, after a short stay in England, I shall return hither for a lengthened sojourn. Whether it will be for a life of joy or of sorrow will not depend upon myself. My fate is in your hands.

'J. M.'

From Maynard's official report to Mr Tresham it is sufficient to make the following extracts:—

'I beg to report my arrival at Mexico, and subsequently at Guanaxuato.

'On reaching the capital I lost no time in finding out Don Silva, the agent to whom I brought letters. He is one of the most respectable *procuradórs*, or solicitors, in Mexico. Having examined my credentials, he placed himself most cordially at my disposition, and greatly facilitated my search among the Government records for verifications of the statements made by the representatives of the late proprietors of the *Real de Dolóres*, and in proving the validity of the title. On these two important points I am fully satisfied with the results of my inquiries. It is true that the Government returns on which the royalty is paid are considerably below the actual amount stated in the private archives of the family, but the difference is not greater than is justified by the custom of the country, all mines being assessed on a very low estimate of their average yield.

'The title is indisputably good, a rare circumstance in this country, and one that greatly enhances the value of the property; and the mortgagees are ready to hand over the requisite certificates on receiving payment in cash to the extent of one-third of their claims, and a covenant to pay the remainder by equal half-yearly instalments, extended over a space of five years; they undertaking to keep the offer open for six months.

'Having completed my preliminary work in the capital, I started for Guanaxuato, accompanied by a confidential clerk of the agent, a skilled engineer and surveyor, and a professional working miner. The journey cost more than I could have

wished, as we were strongly advised, on account of the disturbed state of the country, to travel with a rather numerous escort. We were fifteen in number, all mounted on horses. I expect, on my return, to dispose of the latter for as much as they cost me.

'We were unmolested throughout the journey, owing, I am assured, to the precautions taken. The mine lies about fifteen miles from the town of Guanaxuato, and a little over a hundred from Mexico. It lies on a ridge or spur that runs out from the eastern slope of the Sierra Madre, at an elevation so great as to secure a bracing climate throughout the year. It is in the district of the famous "Silver Ridge," and possesses a distinguishing characteristic from the whole of the surrounding range, in being admirably wooded with pine, cedar, and oak.

'An inspection of the works showed that the old machinery has fallen into a very bad state, and must be almost entirely replaced; and the walls enclosing the *Hacienda*, a protection necessary against Indian and other brigands, require considerable repair.

'Finding the excavations full of water, I set a party to work, cutting a drift through the hill-side, in order to drain the principal shafts, while, together with the surveyor, I visited the principal *Real* in the neighbourhood, in order to examine their method of working, and also, if practicable, to ascertain the position and direction of their vein. The mine in question boasts possession of the finest lode in the district, perhaps in Mexico. It is a single solid vein, averaging over a hundred feet in thickness, and singularly rich in sulphurets of silver.

'Of the peculiarities and direction of this important vein I made a careful examination; and, tracing it for several miles in the direction of the *Dolóres* mine, I had the great satisfaction of finding myself brought so directly towards the spot where my party was at work, that only the interference of a deep ravine prevented my discovering a visible connection between the two portions of the vein. The inclosed diagram (A) will suffice to prove identity in this respect; a valuable element in the prospects of success, owing to the high character of the mine I had visited.

'During the few days occupied in draining the old shaft, I analysed specimens of ores from the two mines, and also set some men to work washing for gold. From the results thus obtained I satisfied myself, not only that the *Dolóres* lode is the

continuation of its valuable neighbour, but that it maintains its excellent character throughout; and moreover, that in addition to the yield of silver, a considerable profit may yearly be made by the gold-washings.

'Sketch (B) exhibits the condition of the various shafts, and the extent in each direction that the vein has been worked, as compared with the limits of the property. The time and means at my disposal were insufficient to enable me to verify in all cases the accuracy of the representations originally made to you, owing to the prevalence of water, and the falling in of some of the levels. But, by measuring the heaps of refuse at the mouth of each shaft and at the works, I have been able to form an approximate estimate of the lengths extracted, and to compare it with the statements made by the vendors.

'On this, as on all other points, I may say with confidence that the representations which have been made are characterised by remarkable accuracy, and that thorough good faith seems to me to pervade the entire transaction. Not merely are the ores good, but they are abundant, and easily accessible. Whence it follows that a handsome return may be anticipated from a moderate outlay; and this, at an early date after commencing operations.

'It only remains to speak of the political condition of the country, in regard to the safe and permanent carrying on of such operations.

'The results of the conversations I have held on this subject with the principal foreigners and natives are, briefly, these: that the chronic perturbations to which the country is liable are likely to continue, until they culminate in a foreign intervention; but that mining property is the last that is likely to suffer seriously by the exactions of any party that may be in power. The mines, especially those worked by foreign companies and capital, form so important an element in the wealth of the country, that it would be suicidal for any government to seriously injure them. The managers, moreover, have a certain safeguard in their ability to check or suspend the yield in times of unusual danger, without, in the long run, materially diminishing the profits of the working. This is done by restricting operations to the extraction of ores, the reduction of metal being reserved for a more favourable season. Similar precautions are taken with regard to the transport of metals to the coast for shipment. The impression of those best qualified

to judge is that, whether there be any foreign intervention in Mexican affairs or not, no government will incur the risk and odium which would arise from the subjection of foreign, and especially mining, interests to ill usage.

'I purpose returning to England so soon as I have made all the arrangements necessary for completing the purchase to the utmost point possible to me.'

To Lord Littmass Maynard wrote as follows:—

'My dear Lord Littmass,

'I have deferred writing to you until I should have definite intelligence to send. The mail that takes this letter takes also my report to the chairman of the company, which you will doubtless see. I need not repeat, therefore, what I have there said. You will observe that, having written it for City men, I have endeavoured to adopt the style which such people are supposed to prefer, as was early impressed on me by the following story:—

'Certain City magnates, desiring to do honour to the younger Pitt, commissioned a scholar to write an epitaph for the monument they proposed to erect to his memory. The epitaph was accordingly written, and contained an eloquent recapitulation of the minister's services to his country, ending with the words, "and he died poor." This was altogether too simple for their tastes, and savoured, moreover, of the work-house. So they amended it thus, "and he departed this life in indigent circumstances."

'Of the business that brought me here, I may say decidedly that the mine promises splendidly. So much so, that on my return to Mexico city, I went thoroughly into the history of the circumstances which have kept it idle so long. Its very wealth seems to have been the cause, for, under a divided ownership, it led to a bitter family squabble, and costly legal proceedings, to defray the expenses of which it was finally ordered to be sold.

'The one point on which there is room for uneasiness consists in the unsettled state of the country, and the grasping character of the short-lived governments, which spring up in rapid succession to each other.

'I do not mean you to infer that the Mexicans are worthy of a better government than they have or can produce. I believe

that nothing can regenerate Mexico, except a totally new régime. The Spanish race in America is, in Yankee phrase, "played out," and the country is ready to fall, as a ripe plum, into the hands of the United States. In the mean time, the cry among the foreign population is for protection by their own governments. Nothing but fear or force will, they say, induce the native authorities to observe even the semblance of honesty in their dealings; and having, under a pledge of security and fairness, induced foreign merchants and others to settle in the country, those who suffer by ill usage see no plea of right to hinder their respective governments from insisting on the observance of good faith towards their respective citizens.

'The almost universal feeling of the foreigners is in favour of an intervention, which shall either enforce the authority of the President in his desire to fulfil the national obligations, or supersede native government altogether. I confess that, abstractedly speaking, I cannot see the matter in this light. The country belongs to the Mexicans, and if they choose to produce what others consider a bad article in the way of government, and make their country uninviting, that is their own affair. They may be supposed to consider such government as suited to themselves; and foreigners, who have come here knowing what to expect, have no right to decline taking the bad with the good. It is a speculation, in calculating the probabilities of which, the elements of politics and national character must not be left out of account.

'A number of the leading Englishmen here are drawing up a representation to our government for me to take home. This I propose to place in your hands, hoping that your influence may effect something, though the memorial goes farther than I approve. You will now have a personal interest in the matter. The value of the company's property will be greatly enhanced by any measure that will ensure security. I believe that, on both policy and principle, it should be confined to affording friendly advice, and material aid, if desired, to the existing government.

'In spite, however, of any drawback, I consider that no time should be lost in completing the purchase and commencing operations. Three or four years' working on the method I am contemplating will, I am satisfied, cover the entire outlay, and leave a handsome profit besides.

'I propose to return to England with the mail that follows

this, and trust to find matters so far advanced in providing the capital, &c., that I may be able very shortly to return and get to work: supposing, as I hope may be the case, that the company will be sufficiently satisfied with the conduct of my present commission to desire my farther services. I shall have no hesitation in undertaking the entire management, now that I have had the advantage of living at one of the country *Reales*, and daily watching and helping in all the operations. The mine which I fixed upon for this purpose has been most successful for many years, under the management of a scientific Englishman, whose own share in the profits, for he is also a partner in it, sometimes reaches ten thousand pounds a-year. At the head of a large staff of native miners and English artisans, numbering altogether some ten thousand, with large revenues at his disposal, his territory fortified by a high wall, and a body of troops in his own pay to escort him and his treasure across the country, he holds the position of a small sovereign, and is received by the ruler of the country almost as an equal.

'Here is a sample of the dialogues which occur when a general belonging to the party in opposition to the government, applies to the director of a mine for a loan.

'General says, with a profusion of compliments, that he and his friends fully recognise the value of such institutions, and would not injure them on any account; "but the fact is, we are sadly in need of supplies."

'"Doubtlessly," returns the director, "we have it in our power to be of use to each other. I presume that you will engage to refrain from enlisting my men. They would be useless to you as soldiers, for they would take to the hills directly they had joined you. Thus we should both lose them, and I should be disabled from serving you in the future."

'"Certainly. Your stipulation is but reasonable."

'"And you have no objection to give me bills on your party, payable when it comes into power?"

'"None whatever."

'"Good; and what amount do you require?"

'The general says, so many thousand dollars a week, or a month. The money is handed over, bills are given, and they part excellent friends.

'After a while he looks in again on the accommodating director, and says,

'"I fear we must leave your pleasant neighbourhood for a

time. Our friends of the Government are getting too strong for us. So I propose to move on a bit. No doubt we shall pay you another visit soon, on our way back to the capital."

'And I am assured that they always do come back in a few months, and always do pay on coming into power; so fully is honesty recognised in this country as the best policy.

'The director whom I have been visiting was a sailor before he became a miner. Other things being equal, I see no reason why an Oxford Fellow should not rival, or even surpass his success, with such a stimulus as will animate me. Believe me, it will be a real pleasure to me to be in any way the means of benefiting you, who have hitherto held the ægis of your protection over my life from my childhood. Forgive what I am going to mention, if I am wrong in referring to it. Our Minister in Mexico, who has been most polite to me for your sake, has told me that the Queen offered you a higher dignity in the English Peerage; but that you declined it, as requiring larger means to support it properly than you could command. I am confident that such a barrier will soon no longer exist, if you secure anything like a substantial interest in the *Dolóres* venture. I do not like to trust too much to a letter, which may miscarry, but *I know the secret of success in silver mining*. As a small capital only is necessary for the commencement of operations, you will do well to keep it in as few hands as possible. My plan of procedure will be the reverse of that followed by professional miners, who have the money of a public company to spend. Their system consists in laying out as much money as possible in labour, excavating huge shafts and tunnels, and constructing gigantic machinery, leaving it to chance to determine whether the returns shall be an equivalent for the cost. These people have their own fortune to make first, and it is no matter to them whether it comes out of the expenditure or out of the profits. Their employers come next, by a long interval: and the reason why so few mining enterprises pay, and so many people are ruined by embarking in them, is because the commencement is on such a scale that only the most exorbitant returns can compensate. Our English mode of doing many things is not favourable either to honesty or to economy. We pay our architects by a per-centage on the amount they make us expend, and a mining agent's remuneration is in proportion to the amount of wages that pass through his hands. I, on the contrary, propose to use just so much capital as will fairly start

the mine, and then make it pay for its own development. Of course it must be somewhat longer before large dividends are obtained, but they will be larger in proportion to the outlay; the returns will not be absorbed by interest; and no one will be ruined by failure. In short, I propose to work the property of the company as if it were my own, and success essential to my existence.'

CHAPTER XXII.

Sophia Bevan, to whom we must now return after too long an interval, left the party soon after dinner, to keep her engagement with Lady Bevan, and Edmund Noel was obliged to remain to entertain the guests during her absence, which lasted the whole evening, and for which Lady Bevan's indisposition was the plea assigned. Noel was a good deal chagrined at being thus detained, as he had really good grounds for wishing to get to London without loss of more time than would enable him to visit Stonehenge by the way. He had undertaken to write a paper on ancient worships as indicated by their remains, for one of those advanced and liberal periodical Reviews to which the national mind of England is indebted for very much of its progress in late years. He had hardly completed his article, when the editor wrote to tell him that a book on a kindred subject had recently made its appearance, a book so remarkable for its research, originality, and suggestiveness, that his treatise would be almost valueless unless he included the consideration of it. He also recommended a visit to Salisbury Plain, in order to compare notes and verify certain points in connection with the remains there, a list of which points was enclosed in the letter.

The consideration that the cause of his detention was a feminine caprice did not diminish his annoyance. As if divining what was passing in his mind, Sophia, before she had been an hour away, sent him this note,—

'Don't fret. You can't go to-morrow, for Lordship has engaged the whole of the coach; and I want you. Good night.'

'How can I possibly help you in Lord Littmass's affairs? was Noel's somewhat abrupt salutation to Sophia next morning, while waiting for the party to assemble for breakfast.

'Others are concerned besides Lord Littmass, and as you know, or at least have seen, three of those who are interested, I think no harm can be done by making you a partner in the information I obtained last night.'

'From Lady Bevan?'

'From Lady Bevan, who has at length relieved herself of a weight by sharing it with me, and who approves of my telling you, of course, in confidence. So, after breakfast, I want to drive you to Porlock Cottage, when I will make a clean breast of it.—I declare you are beginning to look interested now. Well, I like to see men with the original sin in them. But it is of no use this time; your rare specimen of yesterday morning has flown the museum ere this.'

'Do you mean to say that my morning stroll has had the effect of frightening Lord Littmass and a whole household out of the neighbourhood?

'Not exactly. It is rather the occasion than the cause. But I will tell you more by-and-by.'

'I found mamma eager to consult me yesterday evening,' said Sophia, on taking her seat in the pony carriage, 'so that I had no need to question her. But even now, after hearing the story she told me, I cannot make out why she is so much affected by it. She may have failed in her duty, but one's duties towards a semi-idiot relative are not very onerous, and the child has been well taken care of, though not exactly by her. The most curious part of it, to me, is that a man like James Maynard should be such a goose as——but I forget. I haven't told you the beginning of it all. Know, then, that once upon a time, a certain sister of Lady Bevan's was deceived and run away with by a certain Captain Waring: soon after which event both died, leaving an unhappy child whom they had named Margaret. This Margaret being in every way sickly and feeble, the family were only too glad to let Lord Littmass take steps for providing for her, somewhere away out of their sight. The father, who had gone to India before she was born, died there soon afterwards, leaving everything to the mother; and she died soon after her child's birth, leaving it to Lord Littmass's care, and also making him the child's heir. The child was accordingly taken good care of, partly at home and

partly abroad; and seems now to have grown a good deal out of her original weakness. Mr Maynard, from often meeting her at Lord Littmass's as a child, took an interest in her, and has ended by falling violently in love with her. Her eccentricity, which took an artistic turn during the early part of her sojourn abroad, changed its direction——'

'I really don't see,' interrupted Noel, 'why Lord Littmass's son should not decide for himself in such a matter. His father, having disowned him, can claim no authority over him, moral or legal. The girl is not Lord Littmass's private property, I suppose, that he should dictate her future. Let Lord Littmass's son and Lord Littmass's ward make a match of it if they please. It is nobody's business but their own.'

'Easily settled; but if you had heard me out, you would have learnt that there are several obstacles to such a solution. *Imprimis*—the ward does not care to marry the son, or anybody else. She is *dévote*. This is Lord Littmass's account. And, secondly, Lord Littmass's family pride, which, as you probably do not know, is inordinate, will never permit him to let his son, whom he must acknowledge before death, or after, marry under a false name, and then marry a girl who has no name.'

'Is Miss Waring a Catholic?'

'Oh, no; poor thing, she does not understand the difference between one religion and another. Her education has given her but a confused idea of such matters. Lord Littmass says that she would enter a convent or marry a Protestant without being aware of any divergence of opinion being implied by the two courses.'

'Of course, if she lives, her guardian would wish her to enter a convent, that he might have the advantage of his survivorship.'

'By no means of course. She has been in one, and left it because she did not like it. Besides, he could not object to his son having her fortune, unless he disapproved of the lady;—unless he be a worse man than even your instinct would make him out to be. No; there is some motive which I do not see that leads him to object. His pride, great as it is, is scarcely sufficient to account for it; for the world need not know anything about the marriage. His name is not involved.'

'What made him leave Linnwood in such a hurry?'

'Oh, I forgot I had not told you that. Your escapade of yesterday morning made him drive over to the cottage directly

after we had started for Waters' Meet. He there found Margaret Waring reading a letter, which had that moment come from Mr Maynard. He asked her who her correspondent was, and learnt that his son had arrived two days before from Mexico, and finding Lord Littmass absent from London, had written to tell her that he should run down into Devonshire and see her at once, as he had good news to give her. Upon hearing this, Lord Littmass told the dame who acts as her duenna to pack up her clothes, hastened back here, and had a long talk with Lady Bevan, and then went and took Margaret in the Minehead coach to meet the train at Bridgewater, in order to get her safe out of Mr Maynard's way in his own house in London.'

'Monster! Then what on earth are you taking me over to Porlock for?'

'To satisfy my curiosity, and get some information for mamma.'

'We shall find some one there, then?'

'Yes, the old dame, who has tended her from childhood. I want to talk to her.'

The road now becoming steep and rough, it took all Sophia's attention to manage her ponies. The remainder of the drive was passed almost in silence, as they jolted through a wood that became more and more dense. At length, the road taking a sharp turn, they came suddenly upon a fence and a gate, and Noel was in the act of alighting to open the gate, when a man stepped forward and threw it open for them. Both Sophia and Noel were surprised to see a stranger in that unfrequented spot, and looked scrutinisingly at him. Had it been in Germany, the man would have passed without remark as a travelling student. His dress, which was something between that of a clergyman and a tourist, was dusty, as if he had walked far. He carried a small knapsack on his back, and a stout stick in his hand. His face was sunburnt; his hair, which was long and dark, flowed freely over the back of his neck; and a broad brow, and small, intellectual features, showed him at once a scholar and a gentleman.

The two parties gazed for a moment as in surprise at each other, and the stranger was stepping aside to allow the carriage to enter the enclosure, when Sophia and Noel exclaimed, in the same breath,

'James Maynard!'

Hearing his name pronounced, the stranger raised his hat and looked up inquiringly.

'Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr Maynard,' said Sophia, 'but we had just been speaking of you, and were so surprised at seeing you in this place at the moment.'

Looking from one to the other, and failing altogether to recognise either of the occupants of the carriage, he said, in a faltering tone,

'My memory is a bad one for faces, and I fear I must plead complete ignorance as to whom I have the honour of being addressed by. Perhaps, however, you will have the kindness to tell me if this road leads to Porlock Cove. Or, rather, forgive my apparent indecision, I will not trouble you to delay on my account. I can easily go on and ascertain for myself.'

He evidently wished to avoid further observation, but Sophia had no notion of allowing him to escape thus, so she exclaimed, in a voice which was more than usually exuberant and animated, owing to the effort she was making to suppress the tremor of anxiety which this unexpected meeting and recognition had occasioned in her,

'Mr Maynard, I am Miss Bevan, whom not so very many years ago you took down to dinner at Lord Littmass's; and this is Mr Noel, who recollects you at Oxford. We are going to the cottage, where Lord Littmass's ward, Miss Waring, was staying up to last night, in order to see her old nurse, Mrs Partridge; and if you will jump into this seat behind us, I shall have great pleasure in taking you there.'

'Are you sure of what you say?' he asked, in a tone of unconcealed dismay.

As to my being Miss Bevan, and this gentleman Mr ——?'

'No, no; as to Margaret—I mean Miss Waring—having gone?'

'Her guardian was staying with me in this neighbourhood until yesterday. And he left my house in the afternoon, in order to take her to London by this morning's coach.'

Hearing this, Maynard staggered back against the gatepost as if struck by a sudden shot.

'Too late, too late!' he murmured. 'What have I done to this man, that he should torment me thus!'

'Say rather, what have Lord Littmass and his ward done to you, that you should pursue them thus?'

Sophia's ruse succeeded in rousing him from the stupor of

despair in which his disappointment had plunged him, for he said,—

'Tell me what you know, and why you, too, side against me.'

'Believe me, I do not side against you. I only spoke in that way to rouse you from the useless grief to which you were about to give way. On the contrary, I would be your friend. I have known you, or your family, long, and have always been desirous of continuing the friendship.'

'You! my family!' exclaimed Maynard, in unfeigned astonishment.

'I mean that Lady Bevan, my step-mother, Lord Littmass's cousin, who lives together with me, will be happy to see you at Linnwood Manor, if you will gratify her by a visit. Do let me drive you home with us after we have been to the cottage.'

'London. You said London, I think,' was his reply. 'Thank you, I have no need to go farther in this direction. I wish you a good-morning.' And he turned to depart.

'Stay! Mr Maynard,' cried Sophia, imperatively. 'The longest way in appearance, is sometimes the shortest in reality; and I know enough to be aware that you will not reach your goal the later by seeming to turn your back upon it just now. For the present I take charge of you, and insist upon your getting up and accompanying us.'

As if magnetised by the ambiguity of her words, and the energy of her utterance, he quietly acquiesced, and climbed into the seat behind Miss Bevan and Noel with the aspect of one in a dream.

Neither of the party spoke as they drove over the quarter of a mile that led to the cottage. Their approach was noiseless over the road thick covered with fallen leaves. On reaching the door at the rear of the house, they had to ring the bell more than once before the dame, who was the sole inmate within at the moment, could be made to understand that visitors had arrived. She made her appearance at last, out of breath with the work at which she had been engaged, that of packing up, and full of wonder at seeing the carriage and its occupants.

'You don't remember me, I dare say, Mrs Partridge,' began Sophia, 'but I am a friend of Lord Littmass's, with whom he was staying up to yesterday; and I have brought two other friends to see the cottage, and any pretty things you can show us of Miss Margaret's before they are all removed.'

And they entered the cottage as she spoke, Noel hitching the ponies to a tree.

'It must be Miss Sophy, but——' began the dame, when the young lady broke in,

'But not the pretty Miss Sophy you used to call me years and years ago. She came to an end with the accident that spoilt her prettiness, and in place of her there came this ugly me. Did you never hear of it?'

'Oh, dear, yes, miss. Now I do call it to mind; but what with following my young lady about to foreign parts, and what with one trouble and another, I had clean forgotten your misfortune. But you've got the bright eyes and the cheery voice still, miss, that always did one good to listen to. But, mayhap, you are not a miss still, miss?'

'Very much amiss, I assure you, my dear old dame, and likely to remain so.'

'Why, if it isn't Mr James!' cried the old woman, now for the first time observing Maynard, as he leant against the door, impatient of the trivial conversation that was going on.

Hereupon Sophia considerately took Noel into the other room. When they were alone, the dame said,

'Oh, dear, sir, why did you write? I always feared his lordship would find it out; and he came in just as Miss Margaret was reading your letter yesterday, and took her off to London directly.'

'Did he see my letter? Does he know that I wish to marry her?'

'Indeed, I cannot say for certain, sir; but he must surely think that he has good reason to prevent your meeting; and what can it be but that?'

'Do you think he is opposed to our marriage, then?'

'Indeed I do, sir, at present. But I can say nothing for certain.'

'And Margaret, how did she seem to feel the sudden summons? Did she leave no message for me?'

'Yes, sir, she knew how sorry you would be to come all this way and miss her, and she left this note for you.'

Seizing and opening it, James read—

'I truly rejoice in your good news, and trust that prosperity is beginning for you. My guardian found me reading your letter. He asked how long you had been wishing to marry me,

and said that he was sincerely grieved at its being impossible. He was so kind, and said he should do his best to console you for the disappointment. He was sorry to hurry me away so suddenly, but was obliged to return to London at once, and thought it better to take me with him, and let nurse follow in a few days. I shall expect to see you there soon.

'MARGARET.'

Maynard sank into a seat, and read this note over two or three times. Presently, as if unconscious of any one being present, he murmured,

'Can she love me? Surely such love as mine must create love in any woman who is worthy to be loved. It must be that she is scarcely woman yet. Ah, well, when it comes, it will not be the weaker for delay.'

Looking up to question the dame about her, he found that she had joined Sophia and Noel in the other room, and was occupied in conversation. So he waited and pondered.

'Who painted this?' asked Noel, pointing to a copy of Titian's 'Fruit and Flower Girl,' which stood on a side table.

'My young lady, to be sure, sir, when she was in Rome.'

'See,' said he to Sophia, 'though the mechanical part of the painting is that of a beginner, what a refined and spiritual air she has given the figure. I have often looked at the original, and regretted that Titian had been induced to put so much coarseness into his picture, and here is the very thing I had imagined as best fitted for it.'

'Titian,' replied Sophia, 'preferred to take his model from robust health, rather than pale sentimentality. Besides, he meant that for a portrait of his daughter. But, tell me, dame, what has Miss Waring been doing these last few years?'

'She went to Italy between three and four years ago with his lordship's sister, who died there. Mr James came one winter to Rome, and took her to see everything, and we stayed on the summer after that, and then she became very ill, and begged to go into a convent, meaning an Italian one; and his lordship sent her to one in France, and I returned to London.'

'But what did she want to go into a convent for? Is she Catholic?'

'I am sure, miss, I cannot tell what name to call her by. She is just that good, that it seems to be letting her down to put her among any of the religions. There never was born

angel more spirit than Miss Margaret, or more simple, true, and pure. And so pious: where anybody else prayed she would pray. I have seen her kneel, with a couple of brigand-looking fellows beside her, by the cross in the middle of the Coliseum, just as natural and easy as in the great cathedral. And I have seen her do the same on the top of a hill, where we had gone for a walk, just because, she said, the air was so soft, and the scenery so beautiful, it made her happy to be alive. And when I have been in her studio, as she called her little painting-room in Rome, I am sure I have seen her standing and praying before she began to paint: not aloud, she never did that, but lost, as it were, in a dream. One day I ventured to say, "If anybody but me saw you, miss, they would think you were worshipping the figures in your own picture." "Well, nurse," she said, after thinking a bit, "I dare say a good many people have been called idolaters with less reason. I fancy I recognise God in everything beautiful, and it must be a harmless idolatry to worship Him. I only know, that the more I try to do so, the more beauty I find comes into my pictures." And, bless you, miss, though my young lady only copied other people's pictures, the old masters, as they are called, everybody did say that she made them more beautiful than the old masters had done.'

'What made her think of going into a convent?'

'I never rightly understood. She never was but a child in heart, and I sometimes fear she will never be quite fit for this world. She said, once, she wanted to cultivate her soul; but I thought it was rather her body that needed the cultivation. I think she took a friendship for some nuns in Rome, and wanted a little society, and thought she would be happier among people who devoted their lives to praying and singing and charity. Besides, she was really ill, and fancied she was going to die, so low did the fever bring her. How she ever lived through the time at the convent, unless it was the change of climate, is more than I can understand. But I believe the hardships did not begin till she had got better.'

'What convent was it?'

'A French Carmelite convent,' replied the old woman, to whom, long pent up as she had been, it was a pleasure to talk about her young mistress, with any who took a friendly interest in her. It was where Lord Littmass was concerned that her speech was so restrained. 'I was saying, that how she came out alive at all, especially being so weak when she went in, is a

miracle to me. Her religion is all purity and loveliness: I often think she is the real religion herself: while theirs is little but dirt, and ugliness, and misery. There is as much difference between the two as if she worshipped God and they worshipped the devil. She told me about it when she came out,—for his lordship sent me to receive her, and bring her home,—and she begged me never to mention the place again to her. After a few weeks in London, his lordship sent her here for the benefit of the sea, and she has taken a great delight in bathing every morning and evening on the sands down there. The place is so shut in and private that I had no fear of her being overlooked. Not that such a thought ever occurred to herself; she is such a boy in her enjoyment of the water. It was as if she was trying to wash away the memory of that nasty convent.'

'Did she tell you anything about the details of the life she led there?' asked Noel.

'Was this her room in the convent?' said Sophia, taking up a small drawing.

'Yes, miss; one day, soon after we came here, she brought me that, and said, "Nurse, dear, I have been naughty. I allowed myself to be impatient with my studies, and I did this for penance." A condemned cell, rather than a room for a human being to live in, I call it. The floor was bare summer and winter; a little bit of a bed, without a morsel of pillow, a brown rug to lie on, and another to put over her, and no sheet between. No soap allowed, or towel, no sponge, or basin; not even a tooth-brush, the whole five months she was there. A tiny water-jug held all that was allowed to be used for washing, and that was frozen thick in winter. There, miss, you see the crucifix and hour-glass, and the little broom she had to sweep out her cell with; and the straw chair, on which she was forbidden ever to sit: that was for the lady superior when she visited the cell, and to lay her clothes on at night. Not that they were worth taking such care of; for, besides the shoes, which the nuns themselves make out of straw, and the stockings, which are mere bits of rag sewn together, their only articles of dress are a coarse shift, a woollen petticoat, and a gown, and not another blessed thing in the world. And these clothes such as they are, are all worn in common, and are kept in one press, and given out at regular periods, not too close together one may be sure. And there's not a bit of a looking-glass in the whole convent, so that the poor darling could not have the comfort of seeing

her own sweet face; not that she ever thinks of herself; and I dare say would not have known herself if she had seen it, for when she came out her beautiful teeth were half ruined, and her complexion and hair were in such a state, from the poor living and the want of soap, that she would certainly have died in a little while. Mr James can tell you how she looked when he saw her in London afterwards; and she had been a deal worse than ever he saw her. It was only through a French bishop, who knew his lordship, happening to call and see her, that she ever came out alive. He took her out, and then let his lordship know.'

'Well, she won't want to be a nun again,' observed Sophia.

'No, miss. She has sense enough to see that religion isn't suicide, and that befouling and destroying the body is not the way to cleanse and save the soul. She found out, too, that profession is not practice; for the nuns did not turn out to be such models of perfection as she had fancied. And, only to think, if she had staid in a little longer, she would have lost her beautiful hair altogether, for they would have shaved her head, like the others.'

'Of course, she could not keep up her painting or studies there,' said Noel.

'Dear, no, sir. This is how they live: They all get up at half-past five, and go to bed at eleven. Part of this time is spent in making and mending their clothes, while a nun reads aloud from the Lives of the Saints. Then they scrub the chapel floor on their knees. But the greater part of each long, long day is spent in what they call devout contemplation, in rooms in which there is never a fire lighted. Indeed, in the bitterest weather there is a fire for only two hours a day in one of the rooms. And then, again, the poor things are taught to give up all their natural affections; for when news comes of the death of a relation of any of them, the lady superior announces, "the mother (or whatever relative it may be) of one of the sisters is dead. Let us pray for her soul." And no nun is ever told, or knows, if it is her own mother who is dead, or some one else's. This cruel pang of uncertainty is one of the poor creatures' greatest trials, though it was not one that could befall Miss Margaret, as she had no relations to care for her, since her mother died in her infancy, and her guardian was almost a stranger to her. There was only Mr James, who had been almost as a brother to her, and me.'

'Can you believe all these horrors possible in this age?' asked Edmund of Sophia.

'Yes, and more too. Their theory of life compels it, for they hold that nature is so utterly corrupt, that the more they mortify and go against it, the more they are likely to be in the right. When I was at school in a convent near Paris, the younger girls were warned not to uncover more of themselves in washing than they could help, because the angels standing by would see them!—a caution which certainly did not conduce to their modesty, any more than it did to their cleanliness; for a more false and conscious set of creatures never were seen than those same little French minxes.'

'I was wrong to speak of age in connection with the Church,' returned Noel. 'Incapable of advance, the centuries don't tell upon it. But it certainly is curious, that a religion based upon Judaism, whose founder, Moses, was the apostle of cleanliness, should elevate dirt into a virtue, and hold physical filth indicative of spiritual purity.'

'This,' added the dame, 'is one of the dolls she brought away with her, dressed exactly like a nun. They make hundreds of them in the convent, and send them out for sale: for the Carmelites are very poor; and, in fact, though they call it a nunnery, it seems to me for all the world like a poorhouse.'

Perceiving that Maynard was listening to this conversation, Sophia made no attempt to shorten it. He had wandered from one room to the other, and back again, as if uneasy at the peculiar position in which he found himself, looking now at the ornaments which helped to give it an air of elegance, and then out of the window over the sea, until at last he found Margaret's sketch-book. Upon this he fastened, and applied himself eagerly to it for some time. It contained some recent drawings, done during her residence in the cottage. Looking carefully at these, James thought he detected signs of growth in the beloved artist's mind. The saints and angels of old had given place to healthier, because more natural, subjects. She had made several attempts to represent faithfully the sea in its various moods, and that bit of the morning and evening sky which was visible between the cliffs which hemmed in her dwelling. In some of the sketches a solitary form could be seen, either reposing at length on the water, or lying on the sands, as a waif thrown up by the sea, and waiting patiently to

be reclaimed. The earlier ones were destitute of living interest. Maynard looked them all through slowly, and then turned them over rapidly, passing from one to another, as if they were words in a sentence, of which he sought the meaning. At length he seemed to have caught it; for, closing the book, he murmured words which might be taken as his interpretation of the text he had been studying:—

'Yes; Nature, Loneliness, Feeling. The missing sense is coming.'

Observing that he then cast a glance towards the dame, as if wishing to speak with her, Sophia said to Edmund,—

'Come with me down to the sea, and we will explore the whole of this little world, of which we have just missed the heroine.' And they passed down over the beach to the sands where the clear blue water was breaking in gentle ripples. Looking up to the cliff on the left as she faced the sea, Sophia said,—

'It would have been as great a surprise to you to-day to see me here, had you just now popped round that edge, as it was to you yesterday to see Margaret Waring.'

'Yesterday! was it but yesterday? It seems an age. I had quite forgotten it. The distress of that poor fellow put everything else out of my mind.'

'I wonder how it will end,' returned Sophia. 'Lord Littmass is not accustomed to be thwarted, and Mr Maynard seems scarcely the man to study consequences. I suspect there is something of his father about him. I dread to think what may happen if they should clash about her.'

'I really don't see that Lord Littmass has any right to coerce either of them,' said Noel.

'I believe that she must have his consent to marry before she is of age, and Mr Maynard loses his fellowship if he marries at all.'

'But surely he has something of his own, or some occupation that yields him an income. At least he can take orders.'

'I believe he prefers anything to doing that. Indeed, he is now engaged by a mining company in Mexico, and has just come from there. Perhaps he came down here expressly to ask her to go out with him.'

'What company? Do you know its name, or any of the people in it?'

'I remember the name, because I annoyed Lord Littmass by making a joke upon it. I cautioned him against the Dolóres Mine lest he should come to grief in it.'

'The Dolóres! My city uncle's new pet project. And they have employed James Maynard? How curious.'

In the mean time Maynard plied the dame with questions about Margaret, how she was looking, whether she had quite recovered, and about the German task; and, above all, about her feelings with respect to himself. On all points, except the last, the old woman's replies were satisfactory to him, and he had to be content with the assurance that no one had an opportunity of effacing any impression he might have made upon her.

At length he started up, saying,—

'Well, good-bye, dame. I shall do my best, for, as you see, my life is in it. If I cannot see herself, I will see Lord Littmass, and then there will be an end to this hide-and-seek. If you see her first, give her my love, and tell her so.'

'Oh, pray, sir,' cried the dame, 'don't be so rash as to come across his lordship. If you had the law on your side, it might be all very well. But you can do nothing against Miss Margaret's guardian.'

'Very good: then I will have the law on my side. And Miss Margaret's husband will defy Miss Margaret's guardian. Good-bye.'

'Won't you speak to Miss Sophy first, sir?'

'What for? No, no; I have no time to lose in talking.'

'Edmund,' said Sophia to Noel, as they returned towards the house, 'it is very evident to me that this poor fellow will do little good for himself, without the kindly intervention of some one who knows Lord Littmass well. Now, my plan is to take him back with us to Linnwood, and all consult together with Lady Bevan, who has more influence with his lordship than all the rest of the world; and that, if she approves, you accompany him to London to-morrow. I would go myself, and bully Lord Littmass into behaving pretty, rather than see those two lives made unhappy by his pride and obstinacy.'

'It is rather a complicated relationship to meddle with,' said Noel. 'Unknown father and disowned son, and ward who is nobody.'

'Never mind; I will threaten to expose him if nothing else will do. He little dreams who has got hold of his secret.'

'Mr Maynard!' cried Sophia, approaching the window, 'I have come to take you back with us to Linnwood.'

'Lord bless you, miss, he has been gone these ten minutes,' said the dame, coming out towards them.

'Gone! Where?'

'Back to London, miss. I asked him to speak to you first.'

'How rude of him. Never mind; I don't dislike him for it. What does he mean to do when he gets there?'

'I don't exactly know, but he means to see his lordship, I believe.'

'Is it possible that he has no suspicion that——he——is ——?' said Sophia, looking keenly at the dame, and speaking very slowly.

'That what, miss?' asked the old woman, simply.

'Of his relationship to——? Why, you must have been living in Lord Littmass's family when he was born?'

'Well, miss?'

'And you pretend ignorance that——. I mean, can you give me no clue to Lord Littmass's objection to his——to Mr Maynard's marrying Miss Waring?'

'I think, miss, that if her ladyship would try, she might do something in the matter. No one else.'

'Exactly what I was saying just now to Mr Noel. You must come over and see her. Come now.'

'Thank you, miss. I should be very glad to see her ladyship again. It is a number of years since we met, but I am afraid she has not forgiven me for befriending her poor sister. Leastways, so his lordship has told me.'

'You mean, in befriending her child?'

'I did that, miss; but I befriended poor Mrs Waring, too, when all her family were against her.'

'Pray, how did you befriend her?' asked Sophia, drily.

'Well, miss, you see that she and the captain were bent on coming together, in spite of everybody's opposition; and so, as I thought it was a shame to let her lose her good name by going off alone with him, and making a Scotch marriage of it, I went with them to church and saw them married respectably.'

'You did! Why, I have always understood that they never were married at all, and Lady Bevan believes so of her own sister at this moment. Put on your bonnet and cloak, and come and tell her so yourself.'

'No, miss, I must not go there till my master gives me leave. He told me how harshly her ladyship thought of me, but I did not know she thought that about her own sister.'

'Then Miss Margaret is really Miss Waring, and mamma's own proper niece! I shall claim her as my cousin on the first opportunity, and insist on Lord——You won't own to knowing another secret, too?'

'I had no notion, miss, that the marriage of my young lady's parents was doubted by anybody.'

'Of course Lord Littmass knew of the marriage?'

'Not at first, miss, I think, but very soon after.'

'And he never told Lady Bevan, that her sister and his cousin did not disgrace the family after all! Oh, Lordship! Lordship! I begin to suspect there are some very large screws loose in your composition. Margaret neither an idiot nor a ——. Come, Edmund; good-bye, dame. I shall have another ally now for James Maynard. He shall be my cousin, too, yet.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

'I TELL you what,' said Sophia, suddenly breaking from the silence in which they had been driving during the first few minutes after they left the cottage: 'we will have my proposed consultation with mamma all the same as if Mr Maynard was with us; and she shall write to Lord Littmass, and I will add a postscript; and you shall take it with you to-morrow. And so we shall all be helping, like the fairies, to marry the prince and princess.'

'And a pretty piece of what schoolboys would call *æs triplex*, on my part, at least, he will think it. No, no; much as I may sympathise with the actors or sufferers, you must do it without me if you are going to enact the part of a providence to these good folks.'

'That is so like you horrid men. You never will put yourselves to the least trouble to do any good to anybody but your own selves. Now my motto is, to secure what happiness I can for everybody in this world. I suppose you think that if it is to be it will be, either in this world or in another?'

'I suppose,' rejoined Noel, 'that it is to fill up the vacuum of single life that women so love to bestow their solicitudes upon others.'

'Well, you needn't twit me with my single-hood. It may be my misfortune, but it certainly is not my fault. But you hate people to be doing anything.'

'I hate only hurry and bustle and unwarranted interference. Nature works by imperceptible attraction. Her catastrophes are but incidental. Her grace is supreme—devoid of visible effort. And I am inclined to think that woman works most effectually when she most nearly imitates nature in this respect.'

'And you would have little partial me attempt to rival the grand style of omnipotent Nature!'

'Surely; if we wish to be considered homogeneous with the rest of that of which we are a part.'

'I have not forgotten your rudeness in calling me "three fine days and a thunderstorm." Arctic circle, region of frost, fog, and iceberg, I dub you: where nature works, if it work at all, in silence, and coldness, and everlasting death. My temperate, or, if you will, torrid zone, before your frozen one!' And she lashed her ponies impetuously onwards.

'And now that the thunderstorm has cleared the air, pray tell me whether your anxiety is really to promote your end; or merely to *do* something, that may or may not promote it?'

'No, sir: much as I love doing, you ought to know by this time that I don't go on your plan, and do mischief rather than do nothing.'

'My plan! Thunderstorm coming on again.'

'Yes, it is your plan—in spite of all I said about your hating work, which is quite true—to tease me by bringing your northern currents to chill my warm intentions and energies.'

'How dearly women love personalities! Two men would have discussed the affairs of your protégés, if they discussed them at all, without a word about their own characters, or personal relations, or anything whatever but what might throw light upon the matter. I suppose, however, that if women were scientifically educated, we should not love them so well.'

'I don't believe it would make a bit of difference. We love men just as well, whether they are scientifically educated or not. More fools we, for it is little they deserve it,' said Sophia, hastily dashing away the tears which, in spite of herself, persisted in dimming her bright eyes.

Without appearing to notice her emotion, Noel continued: 'If you suppose that the interference of another man will have a beneficial effect upon Lord Littmass, I think you very much mistake both his character and that of men in general. He may take from you and Lady Bevan a good deal that he would not for a moment stand from a man; especially from one almost young enough to be his grandson. The complication becomes, after your discovery of to-day, more of a family one than ever; and the fewer the people who mix themselves up in it, the better for all parties.'

'Well, at any rate, if I find that I really need your help, you will give it to me?'

'You have not now to learn that, I hope,' said Noel in a softer tone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

'WELL, mamma,' exclaimed Sophia, as soon as she found herself alone with Lady Bevan, 'we've had a long talk with Dame Partridge, and we've seen James Maynard, and tried to bring him back with us; but finding Margaret was not there he gave us the slip, and is off, no one knows where. He seems to be madly in love with this little Miss Margaret, and looks ready to play Faust, and the devil too, on her account. I shouldn't wonder if he has gone straight back to London to find his lordship, and demand her of him. And——'

'Does he know,—did you or the dame tell him of his father?'

'Ah, the old woman does know that, then? I thought as much; but she was so close about her secret.'

'Then Littmass was in time to get Margaret away before James arrived? That is indeed a happy circumstance. Oh, if they had met!'

'Unless he had got there first, and carried off the young lady before her guardian made his appearance; which would have settled matters much more satisfactorily, to my mind. I have always felt a craving for more relations, and I should have gained two cousins at once.'

'My dear, you forget. Fancy Lord Littmass having the child of my poor disgraced sister for his daughter-in-law. You cannot have forgotten my telling you that this poor girl was left an infant by a younger sister of mine, who was basely betrayed by the false promises of a villain, and died of her shame and a broken heart soon after he left her?'

'No shame to her at all, dear mamma, even supposing it to be all true; and I can't think how anybody can consider it so. I shouldn't, if it happened to me, I am sure. Oh, those villain men. Why should we be blamed for their fault? I wish I had the making of the laws. But I am forgetting to tell you the great discovery I have made. Stop: do you believe old Dame Partridge has any motive for telling a lie?'

'A lie! about what? What has she told you?'

'That she accompanied your sister and Captain Waring when she left her home——'

'Yes, I know she did; and have never forgiven the part she took in encouraging their disgraceful conduct——'

'Let me finish, please. She accompanied your sister when she went off with Captain Waring, and was present in the church when they were married.'

'Married! Oh, if it were only true! But Littmass assured us all that he had made every inquiry; and he even dismissed Partridge for allowing them to meet as they had done; and he was so kind in taking all the trouble upon himself, and sparing our feelings——'

'Mamma, if this old woman told me the truth, what must Lord Littmass be?'

'Tell me more of what she said, dearest.'

'She said, in the most natural way possible, when I asked her to come here and see you, that she could not come because her master had told her that you continued to be very angry with her for the part she had taken about Mrs Waring's marriage. She blamed the family for letting her go off with the captain alone; and, out of pure regard for her good name, she staid by her, and went to the church, and saw the wedding.'

'Can this be true? Did she say that cousin Littmass knew of this?'

'Yes, most decidedly; for she did not know it had ever been doubted. So that her statement was not made in self-defence, or in contradiction of any other. But this is not the only error you have been allowed to remain in. In Margaret

Waring you have not found a poor, wretched, half-witted niece. She is a lovely, charming, and accomplished girl. I am in love with her character; and she won't be an encumbrance, for she has a little fortune—unless—oh, that must be safe in her guardian's hands; and if she won't marry James Maynard, I will! He is a man that any father, or any woman, might be proud of: and, after disowning him all these years, I don't see that Lord Littmass has a bit of right to interfere with him.'

'My dear Sophy, we must not be too sure yet that this story of the marriage is true. But, whether it be true or not, your account of my niece reminds me that I have too long neglected my duty to the poor girl.'

'Oh, mamma, let us send away all our guests and get her here, alone with ourselves at first.'

'No such haste is necessary, my dear. In another week we shall be alone. But I shall write for her to-morrow, as soon as I return from the cottage. I must have some conversation with Partridge.'

CHAPTER XXV.

Lord Littmass's house in Mayfair was small, but sumptuous. In an apartment, which was furnished in a singularly rich and tasteful manner, he sat at breakfast, on the third morning after his return from Devonshire; and opposite to him sat his ward, Margaret Waring. Strewing the carpet on his right hand were the morning's papers, already hastily glanced over, and on his left stood a small writing table. Lord Littmass was now breaking through his cherished habit of breakfasting alone when in his own house. It was a habit dictated by his literary character. His writings were essentially books of ideas. As philosophical novels they were unapproached in excellence. Having been warned of the weak point in his constitution, he had learned to manage himself so well that his digestion rarely failed to be in most excellent order, and his sleep light; so that a good night's rest generally sufficed to efface any sense of the previous day's annoyances, including even the not unfrequent one of heavy losses at the club whist-table over night.

It was a happy peculiarity of his temperament that he could avail himself of the Scriptural maxim 'Sufficient for the day,' to an extent rarely attained by others. For he applied it retrospectively, and refused to allow past ills to affect his present satisfaction.

'Remorse,' he wrote in one of those charming, half-serious, half-sarcastic, tales which at once instructed and delighted a whole generation,—'Remorse is the indigestion of the mind. As the removal of the offending substance from the dyspeptic body allows a return to comfort and pleasure, so the ejection of the disagreeable from the memory permits the mind to proceed in satisfaction. The continued presence of a noxious idea or reflection can have only an irritating and injurious effect upon the mental system. That the dead should be quickly buried out of sight was the leading idea of the wise apostle who warned his readers not to look back to things past, but ever to press forward; and who, in his ardent enthusiasm for vitality, made even his dead Lord live again.'

Lord Littmass's forte thus appears to have consisted in morals rather than in theology. The sentiments which he regarded with the greatest complacency were the offspring of his morning meditations, conceived under the threefold influence of sound sleep, a clean tongue, and an untroubled mind. On the morning in question he had written but few sentences before breakfast was announced and Margaret entered the room. The last of these sentences, put into the mouth of one of his characters, ran thus:

'It matters little, in the estimate of moral character, what our relations with others may be, so long as in those relations we act up to the highest standard which the particular circumstances admit of being applied. The game of our life may be a bad one, but it is for us to make the best move the situation allows.'

At this moment Margaret stood beside him, timidly presenting her fair forehead for the salutation which, in these last few days of their companionship, Lord Littmass had adopted the habit of benignantly imposing.

'Good morning, guardian,' she said, in a full rich voice, as he rose to greet her.

'Does the noise of the great city still banish sleep?' he asked.

'I think I am becoming more accustomed to it, but the

gloom and ugliness of London will never diminish for me, I fear.'

'You have been rather spoilt for real life, I am afraid,' returned Lord Littmass. 'The desultoriness of Italy, and the *abandon* of the sea are bad teachers for one already a little too much disposed to reverie.'

'I think I could do real work, if—if I had real work to do.'

'And what would you do if you were absolutely free—free to go where you pleased, and to do as you pleased?'

'I have never contemplated such a fate; but it seems to me that I should make haste and see all the paintings and hear all the music in London, and then away to my studio in dear old Rome.'

'Yet you left that for the gloom, and ugliness, and, I may say, dirt of a convent.'

'Ah, I was ill, and discontented with life, and I understood that——' And here she hesitated and was silent, as if remembering that she was in reality speaking to a stranger, who could not comprehend her, or else to one to whom she had no impulse to reveal herself.

'You found that the conventual life differed from what you expected. Well, I am scarcely surprised at that. But we won't recall any painful experiences. It is sufficient to discover and repent of our mistakes, without keeping them ever before us. There is one lesson at least which it will be enough to have learnt; that while in this world you belong to this world, and that its duties are not to be shunned for the selfish gratification even of the devotee. I do not doubt,' he continued, waving his hand to arrest the indignant remonstrance which he felt was about to escape from her lips, 'that you were actuated by motives which presented themselves to you in the divinest aspect. Such has ever been the case, even with zealots who have disgraced humanity by their crimes. But you are old enough now to be told that it is not only by the motives, but also by the results, of any course of action, that its propriety must be determined. For instance, it would be a dereliction of your duty as a woman, were you now to continue to devote yourself exclusively to the mode of life you have hitherto followed. Education, or self-culture, when merely desultory, degenerates into selfishness. You have read one or two of my earlier tales, and have acknowledged that you enjoyed reading them. What would you have thought of me had I written them for my own

sole gratification, and kept them to myself? You would rightly have considered me culpably selfish. The artist who produces beauty has no right to hide it under a bushel. His faculty is a wealth entrusted to him for the good of all.'

Lord Littmass paused to help himself to some of the good things on the table, and Margaret remained silent, wondering what change in her life his serious tone portended. She remembered, too, that James Maynard had more than once talked to her in a precisely similar strain. The practical end at which he aimed was her marriage with himself. But what could be Lord Littmass's intention?

'You, too, possess faculties,' he resumed; 'and a time may soon come for turning them to account. I do not mean in the accomplishments the pursuit of which has constituted your education; but in the fact of your being a Woman. You look surprised, as if the announcement were a novel, and scarcely credible one; but you may rest assured, my dear ward, that men generally will be of my opinion on this point. I can easily understand your not having thought of it before; yet that not very prudent or observing person, Mr Maynard, found it out. But we will not speak of him. You need not anticipate further annoyance from that quarter. Well, in addition to the supreme fact of your sex, you have certain invaluable gifts of mind and body bestowed upon you by Providence, which constitute an ample capital for the uses of life. I am aware that this is not the view taken by certain good people whom you have met abroad, and that they rather hold it a duty to reproach the bounty of Nature, and to reject the good things kindly provided for our benefit. But your perceptions and experiences have now grown sufficiently to enable you to see that there is a worldliness of another world, little, if at all, less mischievous than the most overweening worldliness of this world. As I read you, you are one in whom a mere selfish existence for your own benefit, whether in respect of this world or of the next, would be impossible. Is it not so?'

'Oh, yes, indeed. Do you not remember my saying how rejoiced I should be to have some duty to perform? Only show me how I can be useful, and I shall be grateful indeed.'

'I was sure that it is so. Well, the first duty that I shall impose upon you will not, I hope, tax you very heavily. After that has been done there may be something to occupy you more seriously. At present I have only to enjoin upon you the

absolute necessity of putting an end to Mr Maynard's presumption. Hope on his part is vain, and the suspense is injuring his career. I expect that when he next addresses you, you will show a firmness and decision in refusing him which will bring matters to a termination. Now, go into that room, and wake up the piano. You need not fear disturbing me.'

Lord Littmass looked after Margaret, as she passed through the folding-doors, saying to himself,—

'Nineteen, and still almost a child: as much so, too, in form as in mind. The dame is right. She is not as other girls. Yet there is no defect anywhere, only the development is slow. The French proverb says, "God makes females, and man makes woman." The idea of man suffices to make most of them, but that idea has not yet occurred to her. What I have been saying to her would have set any other maiden's heart beating with curiosity or apprehension; but there she sits, already absorbed in the reverie that oozes in music from her fingers. She does not know what a personal human sympathy means. What a sensation she would create were I to introduce her into society. It would take all the art of a Raphael to paint her Madonna face; of a Titian to match the warm angelic tint of her hair; of a Murillo to hint the undeveloped marvels of her form through fitting mystery. Woe to the man who shall love her, for she will be pitiless in her insensibility. That clear lofty brow, where the moral and intellectual natures combine to dominate and repress the as yet unconscious physical, will bow to no ordinary assault. Not that her nature is a cold one. No, there is not the whiteness of complexion which indicates the hard, insincere, self-engrossed disposition. One endowed with such wealth of gold in her tresses must some day learn to love. She will love but once, and with an all-absorbing passion. Woe to her should she discover that she has done so unworthily. One man will be a fate to her. She will be the fate of many men. What to do with her? The nunnery scheme has failed. I cannot send her back to Rome, or give her a separate home. He will seek her out again. And I cannot long conceal her here. A rich marriage to one who will take her without any portion, seems the only escape from the dilemma. There must be no going into society, where, even about her, the second question will be, "How much has she?" By-the-by, I wonder what has become of James. The dame says but little of his visit in her letter. It is clear

that Margaret does not care for him, except, perhaps, as a friend. He has always been good-natured to her, and is intelligent, imaginative, and well-looking. I rather wonder at her indifference. But it must not be. Back to Mexico he may go; but he goes alone, or not at all. I must settle that point with Tresham. Any letters?'

This to the servant, who came in to clear the breakfast table.

'They are in your lordship's study.'

'Bring them here. No, never mind, I will go there.'

Then, to Margaret, he said, looking in through the open doors,—

'Thank you, my child. I like your playing very much. You must have some lessons of G——. You will do him credit. You can do as you like now; amuse yourself here or in the library until luncheon. I propose to take you in the afternoon to see some paintings.'

Passing into his study, Lord Littmass threw a glance over the letters, which lay in a row upon his table, arranged so that he could see at once what the morning's delivery had brought forth.

'Oh, money, money!' he murmured; but passed over the letters which seemed to have extracted the groan, to take up one which he recognised as in Lady Bevan's handwriting.

The contents were brief, but they caused him vast annoyance.

'Linnwood, Wednesday.

'Dear Cousin Littmass,

'Your devotion to your duty shames me; for I see now that I have neglected mine in relation to that poor child. Her mother's fault has been too long visited upon her; and if she be inferior to other girls in intelligence, she the more requires the consideration of her relatives, of whom I am the nearest. I was anxious to hear something of her from Partridge, and drove over to the cottage this morning intending to make friends with her, but was too late to see her. What I have now to propose and urge is, that they both come and pay us a visit here. We are going to be very quiet, until Christmas at least. Sophy already takes a great interest in Margaret, and vehemently backs my invitation. She had some conversation about her with Partridge yesterday, and thinks she can be useful to the poor child. James arrived at the same time, on foot, and hurried away after seeing the dame; so I suppose you will soon

see him in town. If you are correct in your estimate of his flighty character, it would be very unwise for two such unpractical ones to come together, even if there were no other objection. I sympathise in the anxiety all this business causes you, and would gladly bear my share of it. Your literary studies demand that you should be free from such disturbing influences. At the end of this week we shall be alone. It will be much the best so for Margaret at the first.

'Your faithful and affectionate cousin,

'HARRIET BEVAN.'

'"Faithful and affectionate." Yes, she is all that, so long as she believes in my—believes that what she knows is all that there is to be known. But how will it be when she learns the extent to which I have allowed her to remain in error about her niece? and about my own real position too? There will be no possibility of friendship; no certainty that I shall not be publicly disgraced. The affair is becoming frightfully complicated. The unexpected development of this queer, sickly child into a beautiful and healthy woman is but an ill return for the solicitude which I bestowed upon her in expectation of an early death. If I let her go to Linnwood, she cannot go alone, and I can hardly prevent the old woman from going with her, since they know that I have no other use for her services here. So that in this case also I am ill-rewarded for my good-nature. The concealment of the mother's marriage might be got over, perhaps, with a little dexterity, but my inability to replace her fortune makes any step in that direction impossible. Then for *him* to be wanting to marry her, as if for the express purpose of adding to my difficulties. Who could have expected him to be caught in this way? An enthusiastic student, with his whole soul in his books, and minerals, and antiquities, careless how he dresses, and ignorant whether or not he has had his dinner: a born college don, whose whole sphere is celibacy. And what a lover! to walk through half a county, as he must have done, to see his *objet*, and just miss her thereby. It is true he could not guess that he would find the bird flown. I am not quite sure that I should have removed her on his account, but for Noel's unlucky discovery of her and her retreat. Curiosity would be sure to have taken him there again; or Sophia, who did not before know she was there. If it would suit me for her to marry at all, I suspect that she and Noel would just do for each other. He

will have plenty for both, if he has not already, unless that speculative uncle of his makes as complete a mess of his affairs as I have done of mine. But I don't like Noel: or, which is, perhaps, nearer the mark, he does not like me. He is civil enough, and even deferent to me; has high respect for my books, and all that, but I can see that he mistrusts me. I find myself shrinking from his clear, direct gaze. I hate the innocence that comes of ignorance—in a man. It is a feminine quality, and is very well in a woman; but in a man it is a monstrosity. What would virtue be if it had no exercise? Flabby and soft, like any other muscle. "Lead us not into temptation" means, really, "Keep from us the experience which alone gives exercise and strength." Capital petition for women, though. Religion is essentially feminine. It involves emotions, which they so dearly love. Noel could hardly marry Margaret without learning about her birth and fortune. He would deem his instinctive aversion justified. It is true that I might overcome all that. A little flattery, skilfully administered, goes a long way with the young. A man in my position, taking this young fellow into my confidence, appealing to the sense I have of his honour and generosity, as the only means of averting ruin, if not disgrace, from a name honoured in British literature,—above all, if he happened to fall in love with Margaret, as I believe he would be sure to do if introduced to her,—yes, the scheme is feasible; but—can I humiliate myself so far? And my answer to Harriet? I cannot delay that long. And what can have become of James? He must have gone to Oxford to digest his disappointment there. Yet he is bound to present himself to the Board. The first thing to do is to get him off again without seeing Margaret, except in the brief interview necessary for her to dismiss him. Hard work in a Mexican mine will soon enable him to recover from that blow; at least, I hope so.

'And now to work, for I must not waste the whole morning in these reflections. Already is my publisher growing impatient. Would that I had not been obliged to take part payment in advance. The very feeling of being compelled to get on seems to arrest my hand. It destroys the freedom with which my thoughts used to form and shape themselves, and impairs the excellence of my work. Ah me! had I lived the life I endeavour to describe, how much purer, methinks, had been my style. I know how artificial it is, and the world is beginning

to suspect it. Did it know all, could it behold the mass of entanglement from which the Man struggles to put forth the Work—work that shall be acceptable by its purity and simplicity—how it would marvel at the contrast between his actual and his ideal, himself and his performance! Yet, why should this astonish? Is it not the unvarying law that out of death springs life; out of corruption, beauty? and this, in the world moral and artistic, as well as in the world physical. But to work.

'"It matters little what our relations to others may be, so long as in those relations we act up to the highest standard which the particular circumstances admit of being applied." An unimpeachable sentiment, with my own practice for illustration; yet I have put it in the mouth of the villain of the piece. But I must not stop to analyse my own position, but set with resolute will to work, aiming at the ideal, which, after all, is perhaps the brighter and clearer for its contrast with the gloom from amid which it shines. From the combustion of the refuse comes the illumination of the city. Even Tophet has to be utilised now-a-days.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

James Maynard left the cottage, and mechanically retraced his steps, not slowly and hesitatingly as if dubious of his own intentions, but with a rapidity resulting from intense irritation. The condition of his mind was one of mingled disappointment, perplexity, and anger. He rebelled against the mysterious destiny that subjected his career to the malignant influence of one who moved in a sphere so widely separated from his own; and incapable, apparently, of sympathising with him. He seemed to himself to be another Tantalus, to whom a fair and reluctant tormentor had been appointed in the person of Margaret. It was sufficient that he put forth his hand to grasp her, for her to be withdrawn from his reach.

And he had come back to England in such high hopes! hopes which had since been encouraged and confirmed by his interview with Mr Tresham, to whom he had reported himself immediately upon his arrival in London. And it now struck

him that perhaps Lord Littmass would oppose his having the permanent appointment unless he consented to abandon Margaret,—the appointment which he had sought solely because it would put him in a position to claim her.

Mile after mile, hour after hour, with heated head and unflagging energy he marched, now over the hills which overlooked the fire-desolated town of Minehead, now along the high road that led towards London, careless of fatigue, forgetful of food, covered with dust, and heedless of the looks with which those whom he met regarded his wild hurrying figure, until night fell, and the lights of the little town of Bridgewater stood before him. Almost staggering into the first public-house he comes to, he calls for beer. Once, twice, thrice the jug is refilled and emptied almost at a draught, and presently he is on his road again; presently again beyond the reach of the gas-lamps, and with nought but the grey track and the pale light of stars to guide him. Nought but the starlight without, and the blind, unquestioned impulse within.

A man may walk through the first hours of the night cheerily and briskly enough; but nature will not be cheated. Let him start freshly as he will, yet three, four, or five o'clock is sure to beat him, if only by the very monotony of his darkened steps. Thus Maynard found himself before dawn resisting the impulse to sit down awhile by the roadside if only for a moment—resisting it again and again, until he could resist it no longer. So down he sat, his back against a slanting milestone, and his face toward a grassy bank surmounted by a hedge, and soon fell fast asleep. The day broke, dull and lowering. There was no sun to glare in his face and wake him; no passer-by to disturb him with curious inspection. What traffic had once been on that road was now absorbed by the railway, and that was too distant to rouse him by the shrill whistle of its engines, or the roar of its rushing trains.

Towards noon he woke and resumed his way, but with a feebleness that somewhat surprised him. Coming to a village and seeing a child sitting at a cottage door, with a piece of bread in its hand, he suddenly remembered that he must be hungry, and hurrying to the inn he asked for food. Bread and cheese, and the local beverage, cider, were placed before him; and after a hasty meal he was again on the road. Soon the sun came out, with gleams of heat unusual for the season,—so at least they seemed to him,—and he felt that his system must

soon give way under the present strain. All at once he stopped and stood still.

'Where am I going?' he asked of himself, aloud.

An answer rushed into his mind. He thought for a moment, and being satisfied with the idea, exclaimed,—

'I will.'

A little farther and a station was before him. Even now the train was approaching. Rushing into the ticket office he threw down some coin, saying, 'Salisbury, third,' and in another minute was seated in the 'Parliamentary train,' and going, by slow stages, towards the scene of his last residence and labours in England. A single thought seemed to have taken possession of him, and there must be no delay until it was fulfilled.

It was very late when the train reached Salisbury. Entering the refreshment-room of the station, he swallowed the contents of a large decanter of water, seized a handful of biscuits, threw down money in payment on the counter, and hurried away; not to the town; not to seek an inn, or his own old lodgings: but away to the bleak moor and wild autumnal night; for his destination was Stonehenge!

CHAPTER XXVII.

Having gained a release from the exacting hands of Sophia Bevan, Edmund Noel lost no time in carrying out his engagement. Leaving Linnwood early enough to catch the Bridgewater coach, he was enabled to reach Salisbury by railway on the evening of the same day. A good dinner and night's rest in the comfortable rooms of the principal hotel, followed by as early a rising as daylight would permit to be available, and Noel was again on the road; but this time on foot, as he wished to be thoroughly independent of man or horse; and to this end he carried with him a supply of provender that would enable him, if needful, to pass the entire day on the scene of his investigations. He took also a measuring tape and a compass, which he purchased on his way through the town, and his notebook.

The sharp morning air, remains of a stormy night, blew

freshly in his face as he strode over the springy turf, imparting to him a colour which harmonised well with his graceful and well-grown frame, and his careless happy life; a life containing just so much occupation as kept his mind in healthy exercise by giving him something to think of, something to work at, something to hope for, and nothing to regret.

'Surely,' thought he, as he breasted the keen blast, 'I am about as happy at this moment as any one has a right to expect to be. Perfect health, and freedom to go where I like, and do as I like, and having at the same time an engrossment of my own selection on which to expend my energies. I cannot imagine anything better aiding one's self-culture than this review-writing which I have lately taken up, when conscientiously done. It gives one a knowledge of men, a knowledge of things, and a knowledge of books, hardly attainable in any other way. There may be something in what the editor said when he told me that it might be a pity for myself, if not for him, that I am not obliged to write for a living. He does not approve of my wishing to choose my subjects. Yet I cannot bring myself to spend my time on uncongenial work. What I have got now suits me exactly, for it enables me to air my own fancies on a grand subject, and at the same time compels rigid examination. Surely the loveliest of all freedoms is this of the mind. Here can I investigate, and reject or adopt any theory, without reference to anything but the facts, and without feeling in the least degree called on to square it by any authoritative rule whatever. It certainly is a great thing to be independent of party, and careful only for truth. Shall I forfeit that independence when I get into public life? I hope not. Yet it is said that individuals can do nothing unbacked by party. Well, at present I imagine others will have to give in to me, if we are to work together. Who is it that speaks of "uncompromising youth"? I see his meaning now.'

And so, communing with himself in highest spirits, Noel at length reaches the Druid's Circle, where, after placing the editor's letter and notes upon one of the prostrate masses, and weighting them with stones to keep them from flying away, he takes out his compass and places himself in position to commence his measurements.

The question whether Stonehenge was founded on an astronomical idea, either having reference to the sun, or forming but one of the orbs of a vast planetary system of similar remains,

or whether it was referable to a worship possibly still older and ruder than that of the heavenly bodies, and thus belonged to a period when men had not yet begun to look for their gods in the skies above them, but were content to adore such powers of nature as they perceived to be ever operating in their midst for life or for death; whether, again, it yielded internal evidence of being so closely allied to other and similar structures in distant lands as to compel a belief in the original unity, or at least the remote intercourse, of mankind:—these were some of the points on which Noel hoped to obtain a light by means of his present investigations.

The subject was a large one, but the details upon which its elaboration depended were minute, and Noel was beginning to despair of making satisfactory observations without the aid of more complex and accurate appliances, when he was startled by a voice close behind him saying, in a faint and subdued tone,—

'I think I can save you all the trouble you are taking.'

Turning round to the speaker, whose unexpected presence was thus declared, Noel failed to recognise in the haggard travel-stained man before him the stranger whom he and Sophia Bevan had encountered in the lane near Porlock Cottage but two days before, until Maynard spoke again, this time with a slight smile,—

'I do not wonder at your not recognising me. Two days and nights in the open air and on the dusty road are apt to disguise one even in this cool England.'

'Mr Maynard!' exclaimed Noel. 'Surely you have not walked all the way here from Devonshire?'

'Not quite all the way, but enough of it to have escaped bed and almost board too. In fact, I have been living so much in the open air of late in Mexico, doing most of my travelling by night on horseback, that I fear I miscalculated the amount of fuel necessary to keep the engine going while performing the extra labour of walking.'

The significance of his tone and manner suddenly flashed upon Noel. He recalled what he knew of Maynard's history, and the circumstances under which they had so lately met and parted. It was clear to him now that, in an access of passion and despair, the poor fellow had travelled day and night since leaving the deserted retreat of his beloved, forgetting even to eat, and had by a wonderful coincidence directed his steps to the same spot that he himself was visiting, and had there passed

the wild night without food, or shelter save the lea of one of those stones! And now he had returned to his right mind, and was attempting to conceal the shame he felt at the irrational part he had acted.

In an instant Noel had determined upon his course. He would improve his acquaintance with the man of whom he had heard so much, and in whose career he felt more interest than he had allowed Miss Bevan to suppose. So he said, cheerfully, and encouragingly,—

'How I should have enjoyed being with you! I came early, intending to pass the greater part of the day here, and make some notes for a paper that I am writing; but I find that I cannot get on as I wished, and was thinking of giving it up and returning. The only question was whether to carry my intended lunch back with me, or to leave it here for the ghosts of the Druids. By-the-by, you must be ready for some breakfast. Will you do me the favour to eat my now superfluous lunch? I can give you some sherry to wash it down with.'

Maynard fixed a keen glance on his face for a moment, as if to read the spirit in which the welcome offer was made, and then, without further hesitation, accepted it, saying,—

'Thanks; and, in return, I will give you the results of my previous visits here. For Stonehenge is an old friend of mine, and has cost me a good many hours of pretty severe work. In fact, I once——'

'Breakfast is ready,' interrupted Noel, who had now spread his viands on the stone beside which they were standing. 'When you have demolished these, I shall be glad to receive some instruction.'

So Maynard fell to, and soon the food and the wine began to tell upon his exhausted system. His spirits rose, and he could hardly remain silent until he had finished.

'It is very wonderful,' he said, 'and somewhat humiliating, to feel the difference made in that noble creature Man by the simple transfer of a few ounces of food from the outside to the inside of his economy.'

'Which of the philosophers is it,' asked Noel, 'who says that man exists only to *move* things, and that all the power in the universe can do nothing more than effect a change of position among its particles, so that the only difference between a state of utter chaos and the highest civilisation possible is but a difference of arrangement?'

'He must have been a near relative,' said Maynard, laughing, 'of the farmer who estimated the value of a picture by the cost of the colours and the labour of the man for laying them on. What is that you would learn about Stonehenge? Do you know that this stone which, by serving me for a table, has taken its share in the office of renewing my life, is, doubtlessly, the very altar on which multitudes of human lives have been sacrificed? It has waited a long time to make such small amends.'

'I cannot do better,' returned Noel, 'than tell you the whole story. I wrote a paper for the W—— on ancient worships as indicated by their remains, and the editor, after accepting it, has returned it to me with this letter, which, if you will take the trouble to read it, will show you what I want here. Unfortunately, I have not brought the means of accurate observation, and he has omitted to send me the book of which he makes such warm mention.'

'My own book!' cried James, glancing over the letter as Noel spoke; 'and I had almost forgotten all about it. This is indeed a pleasant surprise, and the place most appropriate for its occurrence.—And I had begun to wonder what it was that drove me to Stonehenge.'

And overcome by his emotion, he sank back upon the stone, and, pressing his hand upon his forehead, murmured,—

'Margaret, Margaret, who knows but that perhaps even these stones may become your bread!'

'This is charming,' exclaimed Noel, with the generous enthusiasm which on occasions gave an irresistible winningness to his manner. 'And you shall teach me now to review your own book. Its name shall stand at the head of the article as my text; and I don't care if I have to re-write the whole paper; though I must lose no time in beginning, if I am to do so.'

'Look here,' said Maynard, rising from his seat, and mounting on the prostrate altar beside the remnants of his meal, where he was joined by Noel; 'give me your compass, and I will soon show you what Stonehenge means. There is the south, and no arrangement is discoverable here that has any reference to the meridian. But glance along the side of yonder stone, which, though somewhat out of the perpendicular, yet preserves its original relation to the north-eastern horizon, and you will perceive that you are looking along the avenue exactly to the point of sunrise at the summer solstice. A similar arrangement

is observable in other remains of the kind. And there is reasonable ground for inferring from the position of the astronomical stone in respect to the altar, upon which we are standing, that it was during the period of the sun's greatest altitude, the summer solstice, that the moment of its rising and appearing through the opening in yonder trilithon which faces the centre of the avenue, was chosen for the offering of what were, too probably, in later ages at least, often human sacrifices. Symbolism was not always idolatry, or worship always sanguinary; though too apt to become so when the priest has superseded the prophet, and conscience is dulled by ritual. My first object in taking up the subject of Stonehenge and its kindred remains was, to ascertain whether ancient science knew aught of the compass and its variations. I thought it would be such a grand thing to prove that the ancients were acquainted, not merely with the compass, but also with its local variations; because a knowledge of the latter involved a vast amount of careful comparison in various and widely-separated places, such as could only be made by a people given to missionary enterprise, for purposes either of religion, conquest, or trade.'

'They may have known and used the compass,' said Noel; 'but I can hardly credit their science with such accuracy as to believe that they knew of its variations.'

'Anyhow they had it and followed it,' returned Maynard; 'but whether blindly or not, I am by no means positive. The *cursus*, which lies yonder and forms a secondary part of the scheme, is divided exactly in the middle by the meridian line that runs through Stonehenge, yet it does not accord with the true east and west. It is the same with the other remains in the neighbourhood. And you will remember that the magnet, or loadstone, was called "the stone of Hercules," and that Hercules was the sun-god of the Phœnicians, his twelve labours allegorising the twelve signs of the zodiac, and that the Phœnicians were almost certainly the first visitors from the Mediterranean to these islands, and that the Druids were their descendants. It was in following up the subject in this way that my interest in the compass became merged in the interest excited by the religious part of the question, and, once upon the track, I did not quit it until I came to the conclusions which I have indicated in my book.'

'Can you give me an outline, in brief?'

'Certainly; but the details of illustration in proof are

innumerable. It is impossible to interpret Stonehenge by Stonehenge alone. You know the form of the remains and the position they occupy with respect to the encircling *vallum*. Well, going into any old Hindoo city at this day, you find small temples or shrines of precisely the same form, with the addition of a recumbent bull placed in the approach. The bull, as you know, was venerated throughout Egypt and the East as the symbol of fecundity, and gave his name accordingly to one of the constellations. But we must go far back beyond the earliest days of Egyptian history or legend, to account for Stonehenge. I don't say that it was actually built so long ago, but we must go thither to find the origin of the sect that built it, or of the idea that prompted it. And in thus going back we are rewarded by finding indisputable proofs of the genuineness of the earliest historical records in existence.'

'What, Stonehenge in the Bible?'

'Yes; to comprehend Stonehenge, we must go to the Hebrew Genesis and the Sanscrit Epics. Collating these, we discover that long, long ago, far up in North-western India, between the sources of the Indus and the Oxus, there dwelt a race, fair-skinned and light-haired, whose blood and ideas have ever since dominated or influenced mankind.'

'In the Old World,' interposed Noel.

Ay, and in the New also; but wait and hear. It is the romance of the world, founded on fact. Their descendants, as they migrated farther and farther from home, carrying with them legends of happy days and of a land of ease and plenty which their ancestors had enjoyed, described for us the Eden, or "circle of delights," and the golden age of the world, which we to this day refer to the Hindoo Koosh, "the land of Cúsh." This was the famous Aryan race, of whose unhappy internal dissensions we probably have an allegorical account in the fatal strife of the first brothers. Though generally nomadic in their habits, they were of a refined and thoughtful disposition, having a conception of deity and of worship due. Their differences seem to have turned upon subjects partly social and partly religious. For we find the agricultural portion of them quarrelling with the pastoral about the estimation in which their respective occupations were held by the Almighty,—the first indication, by the way, of a sentiment of "respectability," "orthodoxy," or "caste."

'Well, the agriculturists, under the name of Cain, after a

bloody and fratricidal contest, migrated south, and then eastwards, achieving the conquest of the aboriginal black tribes which inhabited India, according to the Hindoo poems, and building cities to dwell in, according to Genesis. It is not with this division that we are concerned at present, though the land which they occupied contains everywhere to this day remains which are not merely similar to Stonehenge, but which are identical with it. Our business is with those who, probably, long after the expulsion or migration of the Cainites, spread from their original home westwards through Persia until they reached the shores of the Mediterranean, subduing, absorbing, or mingling with the aboriginal populations in their progress. Here was the seat of the most adventurous part of them. They had already founded empires in Persia and on the shores of the Red Sea; and now, as Phœnicians, they sent out expeditions by sea to fight, to trade, to occupy, or to proselytise, over the greater portion of the world. The Pelasgic colonisers of Greece were no other than these. Their religion was originally Brahminical, for they acknowledged the One God while recognising him under many representations, and their great priesthood, which thus derives its origin from the very threshold of Paradise, and to one of the orders of which Melchisedek must have belonged, has never been surpassed in the adventurous character of its missionaries, or in its readiness to adapt itself to the people and countries with whom it came into contact. Their rites were many; but the animating principle of them all was one. However they multiplied forms, the various religions which they founded were all based on the unity of human instincts and the worship of Creative force, which they symbolised variously by such things as the Sun, the Serpent, the Bull, the Ram, the Pillar, the Tree, the Ark, and the Ring or Egg-shaped Oval. Of these, the Sun seems to have been regarded in a great measure as Deity itself; while the others were venerated as symbols of the masculine and feminine forces of nature, by and through which Deity operated. Of course, as Religion became *precipitated*, as chemists would say, into religions, and unscrupulous men banded themselves into priesthoods for their own selfish purposes, religious rites, from being means of grace, became only means of superstition and depravity. The Jews, urged, somewhat like the Americans of our day, by that force of character which is both a prophecy and its fulfilment, had early in their career a high idea of national destiny. The aspirations

engendered and nurtured in the struggle for national existence, gradually became transmuted into a kind of *higher law*, under the domination of which they considered themselves authorised to disregard all the obligations of ordinary humanity in their dealings with their neighbours. Hence their poets and preachers sought to restrain them from following those practices of their neighbours which they perceived to be fatal to any lofty standard of character and attainment. The most debasing of these rites appear to have been those which were performed in honour of the feminine element in nature, which was worshipped under the name of Ashtoreth. It was to her that the "groves" of the Old Testament were erected, and in her honour they sacrificed their children in burnt offerings, and practised the most degrading obscenities. Against this worship, therefore, the loftier minds of the nation directed all their force. They could not but admit that, according to their own sacred writings, the Deity was endowed with a duality of functions, and that, so far, the worship in question had a justifying plea; but such duality, they taught, was to be regarded only as a temporary assumption for a special occasion and purpose, and, this accomplished in the work of creation, thenceforth Jehovah, the primal "He-She," must be worshipped only in his masculine aspect.

'In this view they seem to have followed their ancestors Abraham and Jacob, who, by their erection of pillars, accompanied by certain rites, on various occasions, indicated their views on this point; though the latter, to my mind, is made to express himself ambiguously. The priest, however, was, as usual, too strong for the prophet. Intuitions succumbed to conventions. And there seems to have been a special fascination in the forbidden worship, for the Israelitish population were perpetually relapsing into it in spite of all denunciations, until cured of the failing by the stern discipline of the captivity, and their contact with the more spiritually-minded Chaldæans. The Jews, it has well been said, went into captivity a nation of idolaters, and came out of it a band of Puritans. The worship to which I have been referring associated, as you will have perceived, astronomical and terrestrial phenomena, in their creative, sustaining, and destructive forces. It was doubtless a pure expression of simple reverence, until degraded by designing men who pretended to special powers and information.

'One of the most interesting studies a man could take up now would be to trace the contributions respectively made by

the fair Aryan and dark Turanian races towards the idea of Deity and divine worship, as thus exhibited. In Stonehenge we have both. The whole of the worships I have been referring to are indicated in its formation. So deeply rooted in human instinct were these ancient conceptions, that the early Christians, on crystallising their community into a formal Church, found it expedient to avail themselves of the prevailing rituals; and so it came that even the Cross itself was accepted by multitudes on account of its accordance with existing preferences; and our churches are to a certain extent modelled after the shrines of the Hindoos, and these rough temples of the Druids. Draw the two greatest diameters of the *vallum*, place a tower, with or without a steeple, upon the point of their intersection, that is, in the spot occupied by the pillar in India and the circle of stones here, and point the head to sunrise, and you have a Christian Stonehenge. There is a good deal more, however, to be said about the Cross in this relation, which I will not inflict upon you now. If you will come some day to my rooms at Oxford, I can show you what will leave no doubt on the subject.'

'It is a wonderful generalisation,' observed Noel, 'and one that seems to shed a flood of light upon the darkest things in man's history, the origin and signification of his religions.'

'Yes, it is more than a mere curious problem to be solved by research, and then given up for some other. Not merely has its study enabled me to attain firm ground of certainty respecting the process of the development of religious belief, while most others are diving into their own inner consciousness for a light that is only to be obtained by a study of the facts of the external world; but, for myself, I can say truly, that I have derived the profoundest satisfaction of my life from thus tracing the gradual growth and ascent of the religious instinct of humanity from the rude animalism of its first conception by the earlier or lower races of men, and its gradual refinement into a lofty spiritualism with the higher, as through the medium of art, morals, or science, through the affections or the imagination, men have learnt to form noble conceptions of the Infinite, and to respect the consistency of the divine Whole.'

'And you include the New World in the category?' asked Noel.

'Yes, certainly; though whether the aboriginal races of America were conquered or converted by expeditions crossing the Atlantic from Europe, or by north-easterly migrations across

Asia to North America, is difficult to determine. Their own traditions favour the latter. But there are evidences that the Atlantic was not always so wide as at present. The vegetation of the Azores and Cape de Verds makes it appear likely that those islands are the summits of a submerged continent, which once occupied at least a great portion of the intervening space. The legend of Atlantis may be a tradition of fact. It was probably such a depression of the region lying south of the Caucasus, including the Black and Caspian seas, that is referred to in the account of the Noachian deluge. The story of the Ark itself accords with the whole theory I have been propounding. For, when water was regarded as the feminine element of things, what could be more natural than to represent the matrix whence all life proceeded, as an ark floating on the face of the deep? But, however the migration was accomplished, the identity, in all leading characteristics, of Peruvian and Mexican with Egyptian and Asiatic remains, is beyond a doubt. In short, all the religions possible to man are based necessarily upon a combination which it is difficult for the mind to avoid regarding as the chosen process whereby Deity seeks to express itself distinctly to man; or, which is probably the same thing, as the effort of man's intelligence to refer itself to the Whole of which it is a part.'

'So that even uniformity in worship and ideas does not involve unity of race, under such a scheme,' said Noel.

'No; I hold the world to have been inhabited long before the migrations of the Aryans. They were but as the Romans to Europe, or as the British in our day, spreading everywhere and carrying their religion and language with them.'

'It would be a grand task,' remarked Noel, 'to separate the remains of the aboriginal tongues from that of their conquerors, and track step by step the progress of the great original migrations!'

'Yes, indeed. Philology is one of the chief sciences of the future whereby we shall learn the history of the past. Language, mythology, religion, and race, are the main indexes, as they constitute the main elements of man's history. The only thing is to be patient and refuse no evidence, hasten to no conclusion. It is the old folly to assume anything on partial grounds. Thus, men might be of distinct origins and yet utter similar sounds all the world over, owing to their physical resemblance. They might have similarity of religion, without copy-

ing from one another, owing to their moral conformity, and the identity of phenomena from which their ideas are derived. Or, on the other hand, they might have sprung originally from the same stock, and yet have changed to what they are. The conditions under which they have existed can have varied only as soils and climates vary. The senses of hunger, love, fear, wonder, and the rest, existing alike in kind in all, could not fail to produce manifestations similar to each other. Men everywhere see the same agents employed in the preservation of the species, the same moving forces in the universe. They behold in the sun the same ruler of the year, and lord of the day, the banisher of cold and darkness, and bringer of light, and life, and joy, and all good things. And adoring the same object in the same spirit, what is more probable than that such similar beings should adopt modes of expression more or less resembling each other? Yet, though seeing all this, I have come to an opposite conclusion in respect of Stonehenge and the co-religions of the world. I mention this to show you how necessary it is to anything like an accurate result to take account of evidence from every source, and not to rest one's faith on any one line of argument, or any one branch of knowledge. The correlation of historical evidences is as important a department of man's education as the correlation of the sciences. And if you would really help on the sum of our knowledge, you must keep your judgment in arrest, at least until you have consulted all possible sources. It seems to me that the only way in which you can review my book, is by showing the nature of my conclusions and the evidence upon which they rest, and then comparing them with those of others.'

'Thanks,' said Noel, warmly. 'You help me to correct my natural tendency towards the picturesque and sentimental side of things. But, do you know, that I rather admire the simplicity of the old rituals, which, without any admixture of metaphysics, make nature the index of the Divine, and see, even in its most familiar operations, something to respect and cherish.'

'The meaning of life,' said Maynard, with serious emphasis, 'is only to be attained through the observation of the phenomena of life. To the very study that you are entering upon I owe it that I am now a sane man instead of an ascetic monk. The mysteries have for me dispelled mystery, and that which was once a dark and hideous nightmare, is now my basis of hope and happiness. Whatever of evil mingled with the ancient

worships, they at least recognised the divinity of the affections. They have led me to regard that as no true religion, or fitted for man, which ignores the attractions and antagonisms of sex; or which treats the division of humanity into men and women as an accident more or less to be deplored. By Stonehenge the ancients showed that they recognised the dual nature of creative power; and by its companion and neighbour the Abury circles, the nutritive and sustaining power. The Welsh and Hebrew names are one, and Phœnician in origin. Consult your Hebrew lexicon for a comparison between *Caer Saidi* and its equivalent *El Shaddai*. The people who invented this rude nomenclature doubtless enjoyed their simple reverence, though unconscious how closely they were following the very first chapters of Genesis.'

'Have you any theory as to the age of Stonehenge?'

'None; it is only the presence of the *idea* that is to me of consequence. If these be really the "stones of Hengist" the Saxon, as the name seems to indicate, and erected by him in token of the final rout of the Britons, it belongs to the fifth century. The hypothesis certainly receives a negative support from the silence of Roman writers, but I see nothing else in its favour: and the name is just as likely to be taken from the *stones hanging*, or being supported aloft. All that I really care to show is, that even if the Druids made tree-worship their speciality, and the builders of Stonehenge pillar-worship, their divergency was but that of two sects or schools within the same Church; the Church which existed numberless ages before the Gospel, and of which the fundamental doctrine was that of Humanity in Deity, and the comprehensive symbol "the Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden."'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Thus Noel and Maynard talked and consolidated their newborn friendship by the exchange of ideas. By degrees they came to converse of their respective colleges and acquaintances. Maynard made a reference to his recent Mexican expedition, which led to a mention of Mr Tresham.

'My uncle,' said Noel; and presently named Lord Littmass.

'My guardian,' said Maynard, 'and the last time I was at Stonehenge he suddenly and mysteriously appeared, and carried me away.'

'Just what I shall do this time,' returned Noel, 'only the mysterious appearance is on your side. Had we not better be starting homeward?'

By the time they were half-way back to Salisbury, Maynard had yielded to his companion's entreaty that he would return with him to London, and take up his quarters in Mr Tresham's house, where Noel had rooms of his own, and everything was at his disposal.

As they passed the blacksmith's hut, at the door of which Maynard had stopped with Lord Littmass, he remarked, in a somewhat shy tone,—

'I rather expected to have found shelter here last night, but my friends have vanished. I never find that any knowledge is superfluous, and so I make friends with people of all callings. A bit of blacksmithing that I learned here six months ago came in very handy lately on the Sierra Madre.'

On reaching his hotel, Noel ordered a substantial luncheon, of which Maynard partook heartily, after having renovated himself by a hot bath. Whether owing to the excitement that still influenced him, or his hunger for intellectual converse after long abstinence, the conversation never flagged. He seemed to Noel to have studied everything, medicine included. His bath, for instance, set him talking about the benefits of heat as a renovating and curative agent, and he gave a description of the ancient Roman baths, and the admirable contrivance of bathing in hot dry air instead of in water, so as to gain health and strength by divesting the blood of its lymphatic particles, in place of absorbing additional moisture. Here Noel was able to join him, relating his own favourable experiences of the same process, as still practised in Turkey and throughout the East. From this, the conversation turned to the degenerating effects upon a nation's force of the multiplication of luxuries, and the question, how far the decline of Rome was aided by such causes. Maynard thereupon made some remarks upon the stability of modern civilisation, saying that its only safeguard consists in its deriving its vitality from reason and experience, instead of resting on the dead authority of a past age.

They continued talking in this manner until they entered

the cathedral, there being yet time to go round that fine old structure before their train started for London.

'It is solidly built,' said Maynard, gazing up and around. 'I wonder for what use it is reserved. Notwithstanding all we have been saying about man's antiquity, the world is young yet, and there is time for many an ample change both in faith and practice. By the way, we may carry on our Druidical parallels here. For the sun determines the position of our churches, the cross their shape, and the seasons their festivals: while their doctrines and hymns contain many an allegorical allusion to things now generally forgotten, but belonging to the same connection. Not long ago I found a clerical friend, who was correcting the proofs of a hymn-book which he was bringing out for his congregation, in great trouble about the spelling in the lines—

"Oh, Sun of righteousness, arise,
With healing in thy wings."

He could not determine whether to spell sun with *o* or *u*. I showed him that in using an *o* he was making a pun, while in using an *u*, he was following the ancient sun-worshippers.'

'And how did you settle it?'

'I proposed to put in both, and leave it to the congregation to make their own choice. But he ultimately escaped the difficulty by altering it to

"Oh, angel of salvation, rise,"

because, as he very properly observed, "angels, you know, have wings:"—an amendment and a reason at which I did not think it necessary to cavil. That hymn reminds me of another and most curious parallel. I dare say you know of a custom which prevails in many parts of the country, of people squeezing themselves and their children through an opening in a rock, for the sake of "luck." A cleft rock has in all ages been associated with the worship of the Stone and Pillar, and there is abundant reason for supposing that the idea governed the construction of all the Druidical remains. The trilithons of Stonehenge are just what would be used for people to enter through into the inner shrines. Such passage was regarded as equivalent to a process of regeneration, precisely as is described in the Gospels. Few people, I take it, know the real allusion in the favourite hymn which commences,—

"Rock of ages, cleft for me."

It may be that the first impression which is apt to be produced by such investigations is, that all religions are false. But the later one will inevitably be that all are true, or at least have a common and fundamental element of truth.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

And so the conversation was continuous, as that of friends who had not met for years, and have much to tell each other. And Noel marvelled at the contrast between Maynard's present condition of intelligence and observation, and his mood and conduct of a few hours back.

Not a word was said of Margaret, although she was all the time uppermost in Maynard's mind; while in that of Noel, the knowledge of his companion's relations with her divided his consideration equally with his remembrance of the undeclared relationship to Lord Littmass. Thus Noel was in possession of the clue to every action and thought of Maynard's, while to Maynard he was little more than a newly and timely made acquaintance.

Knowing what an advantage it would give to Maynard to be made aware of his real position, he could not but long to impart to him the secret of his birth, as a key to unlock all mysteries for him, and solve all his difficulties. But the secret was not his own; and Noel was a loyal man, as Sophia Bevan well knew when she entrusted him with it. She little thought, however, how soon and how sore his temptation would be.

Maynard made no secret of his anxiety to secure beyond recall the appointment of permanent director and manager of the Dolóres Mine, although he said nothing of his special reason for wishing it. Noel, however, comprehended him perfectly, and determined to espouse his cause, if needful, with his uncle. His doubt of such interference being necessary arose from his being unable to believe that the secret would be much longer kept from Maynard, who, as only son of a rich nobleman, would not feel called on to accept such a situation.

On arriving in London, Noel found the following letter from Sophia awaiting him:—

'Linnwood.

'Dear Child,

'As soon as you left us mamma went to the cottage, and found the dame gone and a stranger in charge. She brought back a note for me from the old woman, which said that she hoped I would not take offence at her declining to come to Linnwood, but she could not run the risk of offending Lord Littmass, who has been very good to her in her troubles, and that she had just received orders to set off for London at once. I hope soon to see her back again, for mamma has written to ask his lordship to send Margaret to us for a nice long visit, with the dame.

'Now, don't be disagreeable, and say that I imagine things instead of demonstrating them, when I tell you that I believe the old woman, and am positive it is all a story of Lord Littmass's own making about Margaret's mother not being married. Mamma thinks we must have mistaken the meaning of the dame's phrase, and that it was a mere euphemism. She is so used to believing in "cousin Littmass," that it would be as painful to her to have to cease to do so, as pleasant to be able to believe in her sister's "untarnished honour," as she calls it. So, between the balanced evidence, custom rather wins the day.

'I am so stupid about these things, never having myself been either married or *not married*, that I can't see the crime of being deceived. But then, you say I am only half a woman, or if you don't say it you think it, which is worse; for I would rather have you say what you don't think, than think what you don't say, when it's anything disagreeable about me. (At any rate, I am not *manly* enough to throw contempt upon a poor woman for being wronged by a man.) And don't think me unwomanly, if I rebel against another of your manly ordinances. Mamma has told me what the poor dame meant by her "troubles."

'Once upon a time, she was a well-to-do industrious body, having a little money of her own, partly inherited and partly earned. She was induced to marry a butler of Lord Littmass's. This man took every sixpence she had, and bought a public-house with it, making a will in her favour. He then took to drinking, and being otherwise *manly*, quarrelled with and ill-used her, tore up his will, and died. Whereupon, by virtue of man-made law, his brother inherited the whole of the property, which had been purchased with her money; and she was left utterly penniless. At best, had it not been invested in houses or land,

she would have been entitled to but a third of her own money. The brother, on being appealed to, declined to part with any portion of what was legally his, and the poor plundered widow had to return to service to escape starvation. And in the mean time, the brother has taken a young wife and died, leaving her all the poor dame's property.

'If she is not provided for by Lord Littmass, we mean to take care that she is not obliged to end her days in a workhouse, which must otherwise be her reward for trusting to masculine justice. If I only were a man, I would not rest until I had abolished such a cruelty and disgrace out of the land. I shall sing with greater vigour than ever, in future,—

"It's oh! to be a slave,
Along with the barbarous (?) Turk,
Where woman has never a soul to save,
If this be Christian work."

'I had rather be denied my soul in Turkey, than my reason in England.

'Mamma has just got an affectionate note from Lord Littmass, which must have crossed hers, saying that "the poor child is in an excitable state, and requires change to a less stimulating air, with entire rest and seclusion," and that he thinks of sending her abroad at once. Now that I have begun to distrust him, I find myself doubting everything that comes from him. Do find out what you can for me, and what Mr Maynard is about. Perhaps your City uncle can tell you.

'Ever yours,
'S. B.'

CHAPTER XXX.

Failing to hear from Lord Littmass at once, Lady Bevan began to be infected by Sophia's anxiety and excitement about Margaret. The favourite plea, 'urgent family affairs,' was successfully put into operation with their remaining guests, and the day that followed the arrival of Maynard and Noel in London, brought the two ladies to their town house, whence a note was at once despatched by Sophia to Edmund.

As if impelled by a presentiment of gathering ills, which

might incapacitate him for future work, Lord Littmass had, by a successful effort of will, thrown off the sense of his outward position, and forced his mind into its favourite channel. And thus, while all the other parties concerned in his decision were in eager and anxious deliberation, Margaret, the object of them, was placidly following her innocent avocations; and Lord Littmass, the subject of them, was urging on his work of artistic creation with a rapidity and brilliancy never before known to him.

He was conscious of a force impelling him with a strange and resistless pressure, and that half alarmed him, even while he admired, and availed himself of its effects.

'Can it be true for me,' he thought, as, pen in hand, he followed his habit of jotting down his thoughts as they flowed, 'that the days of my work are numbered, and that I am already approaching the end of my appointed week of work? I never read that the Almighty was hurried towards the end of the earth's creation, though certainly it was left far from finished as an abode for human beings. What is it that thus impels me? What is the nature of this exaltation or excitement? I can trace it to nothing within myself; and as for my circumstances, their crisis would rather crush the intellectual faculties than accelerate their action. Whatever it may be, I will reap the benefit without questioning. What a grand thing it would be could one always work at will at the highest degree of intensity; without need of rest or break, or of artificial stimulants to one's flagging genius, until the work were done. Would that it were as pleasant to work out the actual problems of one's own life, and to extricate oneself from its difficulties, as it is to unravel the tangled clues of these creatures of the imagination. It is very clear, if my story be true to nature, that the noblest and best of men and women are as liable to contract impracticable relations with each other, as the reckless or designing. It is in their mode of acting under such circumstances that their nobility exhibits itself.

'My poor little Margaret,—how little she dreams of the character she has suggested to me, and the use I have made of her; or of the situation into which the unequal development of her nature has led her imaginary counterpart, the Ione of my tale. With a poor or ordinary creature, the problem would easily be solved by sin or death. But she is one of those who can neither sin nor die. There is a strength of fibre in her nature, physical as well as spiritual, that makes such solution im-

possible. If she could sin, she would fade away and die. Mere suffering she would endure to any extent; but through the portals of wrong-doing is no exit for her.

'The situation, then, is an impossible one for Art, because the key is beyond Art to fashion. Success in accomplishing this deliverance will be my highest triumph.

'Methinks I hear the shallow critic of the Moralities exclaim against the placing of people so excellent in such a position. Fool! how otherwise could their excellence be proved and manifested? A noble nature is wasted upon ordinary situations. Set Genius to do clerk's work for shillings a-week! Whom the gods love they chasten.

'"But people so good would have avoided such complications."

'Ha! master critic, again your shallow cavillings? Suspecting no ill does clearly not rank with you among the higher moralities. The lightning does not stop to count the cost when it darts from its home in the cloud to the bosom of the earth. The loves of the pure and the true are without prudence or anticipation. If certain natures approach each other too nearly, like heaven's own bodies, they must rush together and blend. In every living breast dwells a potentiality of ruin. Circumstances govern all without: character all within.

'I could rescue Ione from her dilemma by summoning the Melodrame to her aid. Nature is often melodramatic, and by seasonable catastrophe cuts knots which are more than Gordian. But Art must not thus shirk difficulties. My characters must evolve their own destinies. Otherwise I own the enigma I have propounded to be insoluble.

'Clement and Ione must have loved each other under any circumstances which brought them together. That Ione is unable to love her husband as he claims to be loved, is a misfortune only to have been avoided by his foreseeing the incompatibility of their natures in time to prevent their union. Yet it is a question whether a man of Julio's disposition could have ignored his passion sufficiently to allow him for a moment to admit the possibility of his failure to make her love him. It is not enough for him that she loves him tenderly as any sister, and would gladly undergo any suffering to save him from pain. He knows that in the conflict between her love and her duty she suffers acutely, and is forsaking all for the latter. He knows that even Clement, while loving her so entirely, and not

without conviction of mutuality, is yet truly and loyally attached to him, and mourns over the unhappy fatality which binds him to his friend's wife.

'It is the very nobility of all the characters, as I have drawn them, that constitutes the difficulty. A Frenchman would have no scruple in representing Julio, in an access of high-strung feeling, sundering the ties which bind Ione to him, and yielding her up to Clement. But these, being what they are, would not accept his sacrifice. They could not be happy while he was pining in his wretched solitariness.

'Besides, Julio is hardly a Frenchman's hero. He believes in life as a period and method of discipline, as well as of enjoyment, a process of education, with difficulties not to be shirked. He believes that Ione's soul, as well as her body, was entrusted to his charge at their marriage; and that it would be a derogation of his duty thus to release her from hers. And, strange to say, in thus adopting the most selfish course possible, he does not consciously think of himself.

'And so stands the puzzle, which, but for the arrest of certain developments, or harmonies, in those concerned, would have had no existence:—illustrating my proposition, that the best of human beings may, with perfect blamelessness of character, intention, and action, occupy the most awkward and uncomfortable relations to each other. Whence follows legitimately my deduction, that it is not our relation to each other, but our conduct under that relation, that is of account in the supreme estimate of character.

'But how shall I solve the situation? Once again, shall I descend into the region of melodrama, and summon the gross arm of physical catastrophe to the relief of spiritual grievances?

'Julio might commit suicide.

'Bah! Any one can do that: and I have made him of sterner stuff than a sentimental Frenchman. He knows, too, that his voluntary death would never be accepted by Ione as a contribution to her happiness.

'Again, Ione might die. Already I foresee her in the agony of the conflict, crying,—

"Peace! peace! Orestes-like, I pray for peace!"

and blessing God that He hath made death.

'A voluntary death for Julio would solve nothing, for it would not free Ione's soul. It would rather bind her to his

memory, and make her love hateful to her. His accidental death might prove favourable to Clement's wishes; but accidental deaths do not always occur when they would be most convenient. Neither do they always take the right person. In such matters the perversity of Providence is very conspicuous.

'Thus in Nature. But in Art? Shall I descend? No, a thousand times, no. In this, my latest work, I record my highest aim. I will not lower it to the general level of the vulgar. Cost me what it may, I will so lift myself up as to draw others up to me. By the way, I wonder where I have heard something like that before. I may have but a small following thereby, but it will be of the elect. Happy marriages are common enough—in books but a happy un-marriage! That would indeed be something original.'

'If you please, my lord, the servant waits for an answer.'

It was a note from Lady Bevan, announcing the arrival of herself and Sophia in London, and asking when she would find him at home.

Despatching a hasty reply welcoming her to town, and excusing his delay in acknowledging her former letter, on the score of overwhelming occupation, which would not permit him to see her till the day after the morrow,—Lord Littmass, when alone again, almost writhed under this fresh accession to the gathering storm of his troubles. How could he longer keep his cousin in ignorance? And every hour he expected James to present himself to him, asking Margaret in marriage, and requiring a reason for his refusal.

'If you please, my lord, Mr Tresham's servant has brought this note, and waits for an answer.'

'This, at least, is only business, and need not cause me any annoyance,' thought Lord Littmass to himself. '"Wishes particularly to see me in the morning." Tone seems more serious than necessary. Pooh! I am growing nervous. I wonder if he knows where James is. Who brought this note?'

'Mr Tresham's own man, my lord.'

'Ask if he happens to know whether Mr Maynard has called on his master lately.'

The man returned with information to the effect that Mr Maynard was at that moment staying at Mr Tresham's house, having arrived there with Mr Edmund Noel the evening before.

This intelligence filled up the measure of Lord Littmass's annoyance, and, by the number of reflections it suggested,

put a stop to all further progress with his work. Lady Bevan and Sophia on one side; James, young Noel, and old Tresham on the other. Interviews requested; explanations sought; arrangements to be made suiting all parties, without compromising himself; and the clearheaded money-king Tresham, in probable complexity with his own unacknowledged son, the first to open the fire.

What wonder was it that it needed all his practised self-command at the dinner-party, to which he presently went,—for the time and the opportunity for taking Margaret out, as he had said, had passed unheeded,—to resist the temptation to forget his cares in deep drinking; or at the whist-table afterwards, to refrain from plunging into desperate excess of gaming? But his temper proved equal to the occasion. None noticed in his utterances any lack of the refined wit for which he was famous; and when, next morning, he received Mr Tresham, it was with the air of a man who, so far from anticipating aught disagreeable, was in a position and a mood to confer favours.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Lord Littmass at once detected in his visitor's manner a nervousness which, by its contrast with his usual good-humoured jauntiness, indicated his pre-occupation with something more than mere business. The information obtained on the previous day supplied Lord Littmass with a clue, and placed him on his guard. No one knew better than he how to encourage another to speak freely on that which he wished to hear, or to discourage him from approaching an unwelcome subject. He had no idea what Mr Tresham could have to say, that he should dislike to hear, but he perceived by the general combination of persons and circumstances, that personal as well as business matters might possibly be brought forward. His plan, therefore, would be to cut the interview short by restricting it to business. To do this without offending Mr Tresham, to whom he was under considerable obligations, might require very careful management.

'Very much engaged just now, my dear sir, but always at your service. Pray be seated. A satisfactory report from our Mexican commissioner, I trust?'

'It is in respect to our Mexican enterprise that I have intruded on your lordship this morning. Mr Maynard, your lordship's *protégé*, has proved so worthy of the trust confided to him, that we are anxious to secure his services permanently, and to send him back without loss of time.'

'I have been expecting a visit from him, but, as he has not called, I presume that he is out of town.'

'He has been absent, but has now returned. My nephew, who knew something of him at the University, and has the highest regard for him, invited him to stay with us, and he is now at my house.'

'I am delighted to hear of this, for it affords you an admirable opportunity of ascertaining his character and efficiency. I assure you that I know of no obstacle to his early, his immediate, return to Mexico. I presume that there is no hitch about the purchase-money?'

'None whatever, so far as I am aware. Your lordship knows the terms agreed on. I am prepared to be even more liberal if I get my own way in certain details of arrangement.'

'I presume, then, that all that remains is for Mr Maynard to be presented to the Board, and to have his appointment formally ratified, and then to repair to Mexico to make preparations and to await the remittance of the capital. Or, is it proposed to send that with or by him?'

'It is proposed to remit the first instalment to the bankers in Mexico, direct, and to open a working credit with them in time for Mr Maynard to avail himself of it immediately upon his arrival. But——'

'Nay, I see no room for a "but," if all be so satisfactory and straightforward.'

'The fact is, my lord,' continued Tresham, speaking with hesitation, as if aware that he was about to tread upon delicate ground; 'the fact is, that in an operation of this nature, which involves the employment of a considerable capital, and extends over a series of years in a distant country, we business men always think it wise to look closely into the peculiar circumstances of our responsible agents. However sound the enterprise may be in itself, its commercial success must be largely influenced by the character and habits of the person at its head. To give you an illustration. The proceeds of a silver mine depend in a very great measure on minute details in the method and economy of working. In the absence of constant and close

plan for the future to engage my attention, which I cannot do better than place before you at this moment. Only premising further that if you have any special reason for believing that it would be distasteful to Mr Noel, you will oblige me by dismissing the whole matter from your mind. I have, as you may, or may not, be aware, a young lady as my ward, the daughter of a relative, entrusted to me by her parents, who died while she was an infant. I have had her brought up with the greatest care, and in strict seclusion from all those influences which are now-a-days so apt to impair the tone and character of young people. She is beautiful, gentle, highly accomplished, and has not yet been introduced. My only ambition for her is to see her happily settled; and judging from the peculiar characteristics of Mr Noel and herself, I believe them to be admirably adapted to each other.'

'But this is Mr Maynard's——'

'Pardon me,' said Lord Littmass, with a deprecatory wave of his hand; 'we have agreed that it will be more delicate not to discuss that gentleman's affairs until he shall think proper to broach them himself. I was about to say that in proposing an alliance between your house and mine by a marriage between your nephew and my ward, my only regret is that I cannot bestow on her a fortune worthy of them both. She will be considered in my will, but at present she has nothing. I do not, however, anticipate any objection on that score when once the parties have become acquainted with and attached to each other, which latter event my observation of natural affinities convinces me would be the result of the former. It will be best for you to say nothing to Mr Noel on the subject of this conversation, and I on my part will be perfectly reserved with the young lady. But, if you make no objection to my proposition, I will arrange an opportunity for a meeting, at which their mutual attractions may operate uninfluenced by any prepossessions.'

'Flattered as I and my nephew may be by your lordship's proposal,' returned Tresham, 'it nevertheless appears to me to be based upon the omission, on your lordship's part, of certain important considerations. Your encomiums upon young Noel gratify me much, for I believe them to be fully justified. But, as I comprehend matters, it is that very character which will prove an invincible obstacle to the scheme. He is a man of the strictest honour, and therefore is one who would never consent to step in and supplant his friend in the affections he believes himself to have won.'

Lord Littmass here made a gesture of impatience at this renewed reference to James Maynard; but Mr Tresham disregarded it, and went on with determination:

'There is but one way to realise the wishes you have expressed on this subject; and that is for the young lady to freely declare that Mr Maynard's pretensions are distasteful to her. His dismissal by herself alone will clear the way. But I must acknowledge to your lordship that however gladly I might fall in with the wishes you have expressed, my interest in Mr Maynard's happiness and welfare (to say nothing of our Mexican adventure) is so great that I have resolved to forward his views to the extent of my ability, and shall be deeply disappointed if I fail.'

'I really must observe,' said Lord Littmass, 'that at this moment it is you who speak in ignorance of the circumstances: and as those circumstances nearly affect myself, I must decline to continue the conversation in this direction.'

'Your lordship compels me to go farther than I wished or intended to go, but I must state, in justification of the course I am taking, that I have good reason for supposing that I am acquainted with all the circumstances.'

'You speak as if the list were a long one,' remarked Lord Littmass with a scarcely perceptible sneer.

'The items may not be numerous, but they are individually weighty,' returned Tresham, with emphasis; 'and I commend them to your lordship with a view to a re-consideration of your decision. The exercise of justice and natural affection is not beneath the respect even of Lord Littmass. I wish you a very good morning.'

Amazed at his dignity and firmness, as well as at the extent of the knowledge implied by his closing words, Lord Littmass suffered his visitor to reach the door before he could reply. There were many reasons why he could not afford to quarrel with Mr Tresham; and he felt anxious to find out how much was really known by him. So he called after him,—

'One moment, I beg. Pray may I ask to whom you are indebted for any information you may have obtained respecting my most private affairs?'

'I never give up my authority,' returned the old merchant. 'But I will not grudge your lordship the satisfaction of knowing that it is not from Mr Maynard: that he is, as yet, in complete ignorance of the facts to which I have alluded; and that

it depends entirely upon your lordship how long such ignorance may continue.'

'Thank heaven!' murmured Lord Littmass to himself. 'He is staying with you, I think you said? May I request you to tell him that I am expecting to see him?'

Mr Tresham bowed and took his departure, wondering at the hardness in real life, of the man who had in his writings shown himself a master of tenderness; and puzzling himself to find the motive of Lord Littmass's aversion to his son, or at least to his son's marriage.

This interview was the result of a long conversation which Mr Tresham had held overnight, first with Noel and Maynard together, in which he had become strongly impressed in Maynard's favour; and then with Noel alone, in which the old man had been completely won over to the cause so warmly espoused by Sophia Bevan.

'I shall not have much of a success to tell Edmund of,' he said to himself, as he walked towards his offices in the city, where they had agreed to meet: 'but I have driven in the first nail just about far enough to ascertain where the quick is. I suspect my lord's greatest enemy is his own pride. He will not be dictated to even by circumstances. Even when one is doing him a service he acts as if he were conferring a favour in accepting it. Never mind, we all have our own ways, pleasant or unpleasant; and in dealing with men we must learn to give and take, or the world would never get on. The question now is, what is the next step to be taken? Having once commenced the attack, it should be followed by a rapid succession of blows before the enemy has time to arrange his defence. Shall I tell Edmund of the offer I have had for him? It is almost too good to keep to myself. Or, shall I tell Mr Maynard of it? It might stimulate him to action, and be a useful weapon against his——ah! I wonder what he will do or say when he knows that. No, I will tell neither at present. Mr Maynard shall see Lord Littmass without knowing a word of this morning's conversation. Time enough afterwards, if necessary.' And having settled his plans, he hailed a cab and drove into the city.

Noel was not long in making his appearance. He held a letter in his hand, and said, in a tone of vexation,—

'Miss Bevan has just written to say that she and Lady Bevan have come to town hoping to take Miss Waring to Linnwood, and begging me to go and see them at once.'

'And what hinders?'

'Only that I have arranged to work all the afternoon at my writing with Maynard, and cross from Southampton to France to-night, as it is absolutely necessary for the completion of my work that I pay a visit to Carnac.'

'What! going to Thebes?'

'No, no, the Druidical, or rather Phœnician, remains in Brittany.'

'Then go. Let your work be good and thorough at any cost, however trifling the subject may be.'

'But about this note, and the Bevans?'

'Give it to me. I will see them. You can be spared now better than ever. The Prussians have come up, my boy, and they shall take the enemy in flank, and finish the business I have begun this morning.'

'You speak like a Wellington, said Noel, laughing. 'Tell me what has passed.'

'Simply this. His lordship was not in the best of humours at my interference, but he wound up by giving me a message for Mr Maynard to call on him.'

'Then I had better go and tell him so at once. Was any time named?'

'None: and I am doubtful if it will be well for him to call before the Bevan ladies have had an opportunity of exercising their mollifying influence in his favour. This note says that Lord Littmass cannot see them till to-morrow. That is awkward. No, I have it. Tell Mr Maynard to write to Lord Littmass saying he was about to call to-day, but that hearing through some friends that he is very much occupied, he will be obliged if his lordship will name his own time for seeing him. And in the mean time the two ladies shall see him first. You said, I think, that the ward is niece to Lady Bevan, and that Lady Bevan intends to befriend her?'

'So Sophia tells me.'

'Then it is important for our friend to conciliate the aunt. He and Miss Bevan can manage this between them, so that you are free.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

After Mr Tresham's departure Lord Littmass sought to forget his annoyance in wondering why James did not come to prefer his suit himself.

'Can it be that he is afraid of me?' he thought. 'He is not generally timid, but love often makes men so. If he really love Margaret he will come himself, and not let a clumsy ambassador forestall him. If he knew of his parentage he would scarcely hesitate to use it as a powerful engine against me. By the by, what could Tresham mean when he spoke of natural affection? I sent him off in a huff because I thought at the moment that he was referring to James; but it is quite possible that he was on the wrong scent; perhaps fancied Margaret to be my daughter!——Well, what now?'

'If you please, my lord, Lady Bevan has sent her carriage, and wishes to know if you would like Miss Margaret to take a drive with her?'

'Very kind and attentive, I am sure,' was the half-audible bland comment. Then, aloud,—

'Say that I am most grateful for the attention, and that Miss Waring regrets that she is unable to avail herself of her ladyship's kindness this morning, but hopes to do so another day.'

'What am I to say to these people?' was the thought that was uttered as soon as the servant had withdrawn. 'Harriet knows that the girl had a portion, and will find that she is very far from being the imbecile or invalid that I have allowed her to suppose. Sophia will go wild over her, when she once sees and knows her. Indeed, I suspect her of being at the bottom of this scheme of asking her to Linnwood. She and Noel are sworn allies, and he and James have suddenly and mysteriously become allies also. And now his uncle, who has me in his gilded clutches, takes James's part, too, and comes and prates of "natural affection!"' and, like a grand old lion, Lord Littmass almost roared with rage, as he found himself brought to bay, and not an opening for escape visible in the ranks of his tormentors. Yet, after awhile, he had strength of will to ignore his gathering troubles and betake himself to his beloved occupation.

'Ah, my pen,' he sighed, 'sole friend that remains to me;

that never betrayed, never disappointed me yet. Responding to my ideas, thy lifeblood flows in words: and from the marriage of ideas to words, proceed others in quick succession, so soon as thou hast established divine *rapport* with my paper.'

And so he turned to his work and wrote on until the late afternoon brought him a note, on which he started to see James's handwriting. For the first time in his life Lord Littmass owned fear. He feared to open and read it. Yet, when he at length summoned courage to do so, he found only this:—

'My dear Lord Littmass,

I reached London the night before last, too late to intrude upon you. I was prevented from calling yesterday, and have learnt that you are very busy to-day. Please let me know by the bearer when I may come without inconveniencing you. I am anxious to see you soon about matters of importance, at least to me.

'Ever yours sincerely,
'J. M.'

Sending directions to the messenger to wait a few minutes, Lord Littmass threw himself back in his chair, and, closing his eyes, pondered deeply.

'Sure of his appointment, he is coming to ask for Margaret. Will she follow my instructions if I allow him to see her?'

Summoning a servant he sent to tell Margaret that he desired to speak with her in the drawing-room. On being informed that she was awaiting him, Lord Littmass went to her. Taking her gently by the hand he led her to a sofa and seated himself by her. Still holding her hand, he said,—

'Are you equal to the performance of the duty which I have prescribed to you?' and, before she could frame a reply, continued in his most paternal tone:

'Your welfare, you will believe me, has ever been near my heart. It has been my occupation through life to study the elements which go to constitute human happiness for various dispositions. To do this is the duty of parents who are blest with children of their own, and who have higher aims for those children than are appreciable by a merely conventional standard. Many consider their duty performed when they get their children married. They must be wedded; but whether to happiness or misery is no concern of the parents. In short, in this dis-

torted world, of which you have as yet been fortunate enough to see but a very little, many parents are only too glad to get their children taken off their hands; leaving the responsibility of examining their respective characters and dispositions to the inexperience of the parties concerned. Regarding myself in the light of a parent to you, I value your future happiness far too dearly to copy such evil precedents. It thus becomes my business to pay regard to the characters both of yourself and of any who may pretend to address you; to warn off those who may be ineligible, and to advise you with respect to those who may persist. I would have you avoid the rocks upon which so many fair and blameless lives are wrecked. You are not one to contract hasty and shallow preferences. It would be a happiness could I feel sure that neither are you one to sacrifice yourself on the useless altar of a fancied duty. Now I would ask you to mark and remember these words: It is even more a woman's duty to refuse a man if she does not love him, than to accept him if she does. To take a man out of pity to his feelings without corresponding feelings of her own, may, to a woman of pure and unselfish disposition, seem a very noble sacrifice. But it is the cruellest way in the world of showing her pity. Better far a thousand times, by her refusal of him, to drive him even to quick madness, despair, and death, than to curse his whole life with the ever-present bitterness of a love unreturned. Finding his caresses abhorred, his very children the objects of his jealousy,—God help the man whose adoration for his wife is met by aversion or indifference. Vain for her to strive with tears or prayers to fulfil his wishes, or to feign a tenderness which she cannot feel. The vision of a man in such plight is preternaturally sharpened. His mental surfaces are in a chronic condition of intensest irritation. He sees through all disguises. And so his very words of affection become converted into taunts at what he deems her coldness, her hypocrisy, or her unwomanliness. The very industry by which she seeks to escape the contemplation of their unhappiness excites his opposition, and scarce a friend or relative, whether man or woman, can approach without rousing her husband's jealousy, for he is jealous of whatever may be welcomed by her as a brief relief from him.

'So much for blind obedience to a fancied duty; for marrying from motives of mere esteem or compassion, and without any abiding sense of likeness or identity of sympathy.

'And the infinite danger to a woman in such a case! Yearn-

ing to escape and to be in peace; feeling a capacity for loving, ever unsatisfied, because unevoked, by reason of the natural antagonism of their natures;—the greatest happiness that can come to a woman is converted into misery and woe. The true love is found at last! revealed only when too late, in the person of one whom now she dare not love, for love now would be sin! Then, indeed, does she learn by bitterest experience that to wed for pity *one* that is unloved is to court misery for *three!* And more than this. *It is to defraud the one—the one only possible love that Providence is keeping in reserve for her.*'

And Lord Littmass paused, as if overcome by emotion, having produced on his hearer's mind the impression that he was relating an experience nearly touching himself, and encountering the pain of the reminiscence for her especial benefit. Had Margaret really known her guardian, his history and his character, while she would have compassionated him less as a man, she would have admired him more as an artist. For it was her own imaginary history, as developed in the book he was writing, that he was quoting in the hope of encouraging her to refuse Maynard decidedly and finally. He did not seem to expect her to reply when he paused. He was satisfied to hear her draw a long breath and murmur,—

'Who then would be married?'

Presently he resumed,—

'I have reason to believe that you will very shortly be required to express your decision in respect to Mr Maynard. I am aware that in his intercourse with you he has been friendly and brotherly, and I can quite believe that it will be painful to you to deny him. But, as I understand your respective characters, no real sympathy exists, or can exist, between you to make such a connection desirable, and it would be a vast relief to you to be freed from the liability to be again addressed by him to such an end. Do not hesitate to tell me if I am wrong.'

'You are not wrong, Lord Littmass,' said Margaret, in a tone that was low, yet so firm and distinct as to surprise him.

'And you have strength and courage to tell him so yourself?'

'I shrink so much from giving him pain that I distrust myself.'

'Yet he will scarcely accept a denial from me without an appeal to you. In such case, let the reflection that in consenting to be his wife without loving him you will be laying up for him misery in store infinitely surpassing any that your present

refusal can bring him, steel your heart into firmness. You can thus show also a little of that regard for me, which he has thought fit to refuse. For reasons which I cannot recount to you, an engagement between him and you would cause me infinite pain and serious inconvenience. I will be at hand to sustain you. I expect him this evening.'

Finding herself dismissed, Margaret rose, and with a sad yet grateful glance towards her guardian returned to her room; while Lord Littmass went back to his study, and despatched a message to Maynard, saying that he would be at his service that evening at nine o'clock.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THAT afternoon, soon after Noel left him, Mr Tresham went to call upon Lady and Miss Bevan. They had not previously met, but yet were sufficiently familiar with each other to make self-introduction easy. Lady Bevan's anxiety and Sophia's irritation under the rebuff they considered themselves to have received from Lord Littmass, would have made the old gentleman's visit most welcome,—so eager was Sophia to vent her excitement in talking with somebody,—even if he had not come expressly upon the business which was uppermost in their minds.

'I am but an ambassador for my nephew,' he began, 'who desires me to express his regret that he is prevented by a sudden journey to the continent from obeying your summons. But he has confided to me the whole of the matter in which you are at present taking an interest, believing that I may prove a useful ally, and has requested me to make his apologies.'

'What can have taken him abroad,' exclaimed Sophia, 'when only two or three days ago he was full of some literary project about which he was in haste to leave us and get back to London?'

'I must refer you to his friend Mr Maynard for particulars. It is some matter of a literary or scientific nature, I believe, in which they are both interested, and about which they have been talking and writing ever since they arrived.'

And in deference to the bewilderment confessed by both ladies concerning this sudden conjunction of the two young

men, Mr Tresham related what he knew of the circumstances which had led to Maynard's being a guest in his house.

It soon came out that Mr Tresham was a warm ally of Maynard's, and intimate with Lord Littmass. On Lady Bevan expressing her fear lest his hesitation to let her see Margaret arose from a desire to spare her the pain of seeing how poor a creature the poor girl was, Mr Tresham said, drily,—

'I scarcely think that could have been the reason, since not only is that very superior man, Mr Maynard, deeply in love with her; but in my interview with his lordship this morning, he did me the honour to propose an alliance between my nephew and his ward, the young lady in question.'

'What! and throw over his own son!' almost screamed Sophia. 'There, mamma, I told you Lord Littmass is a scoundrel.'

'It is but quite a recent impression of yours, my dear,' was the quiet response; 'and you will pardon my slowness about coming to the same conclusion.'

'Did you tell Lord Littmass,' asked Sophia of Mr Tresham, 'that you knew of Mr Maynard's relationship to him?'

'Not precisely. His coldness provoked me into an intimation that his conduct was scarcely consistent with the dictates of natural affection.'

'Does James Maynard know it yet?' asked Lady Bevan.

'No. He and the young lady seem to be the only persons interested who do not.'

'I wonder what would be the consequence of his learning it,' said Sophia.

'I am afraid that our little Mexican enterprise would lose the services of the acknowledged heir to Lord Littmass's title and—debts.'

'Do you speak seriously?' asked Lady Bevan.

'Lord Littmass's embarrassments are no secret, at least, in the city, or I should not have alluded to them.'

'And I, his intimate friend and cousin, believed him rich! No wonder he is so averse to parting with Margaret.'

'Pray, may I inquire why?'

'She has a comfortable little fortune, out of which her guardian has, of course, an allowance for her maintenance. It is partly a delicacy on this point that has prevented my seeking to have my niece with me.'

'It is very clear to me, ladies,' said Mr Tresham, with an

assumption of formality, 'that there exists a very considerable discrepancy between our respective conceptions of his lordship's position; and that it is therefore our bounden duty to reserve our judgment concerning him. I conceive it right, however, to mention, in addition to what has already transpired between us, that, in making the offer of his ward's hand for my nephew, his lordship distinctly asserted that the young lady has no fortune whatever, beyond what he may be able to leave her in his will.'

'And he is in debt! So that the poor child is penniless, according to your showing.'

'A reason, madam, for denying her to his son, and wishing her to make an independent marriage.'

'My poor cousin! I shall dread seeing him now; his explanations will be so painful.'

'Not necessarily so, madam. His lordship is a man of much resource.'

Here Sophia, who for the last few minutes had been silent and thinking, suddenly exclaimed,—

'Edmund ought not to have gone away at such a moment, and left us all in the lurch. I shall tell him I consider it very selfish of him. He should have gone to Lord Littmass, and thanked him for his proposal, and seen the young lady. I am quite out with Mr Maynard, too, for wanting Margaret to pledge herself to him before she has seen any one else. I begin to take Lord Littmass's part, and to think he is right. Edmund and Margaret would suit each other perfectly. I never saw her, but I know it is so. And——'

'You are forgetting James Maynard and his prior claim,' observed Lady Bevan.

'No, I am not. I would find a wife for him elsewhere.'

'My nephew is not the man to step in and supplant his friend,' said Mr Tresham. 'Had I named his lordship's proposition to Edmund, he would have gone abroad, and stayed there, until after his friend's wedding.'

'Much better to supplant him, as you call it, before marriage than afterwards; an event which is never improbable when men marry their wives from the nursery. Mr Tresham, you have been entrusted with one delicate mission to-day. I have a great mind to ask you to undertake another, and tell Mr Maynard that I take an interest in him, and——and am ready to listen favourably to anything he may have to say to me.'

'My dear Sophia, how can you!' exclaimed Lady Bevan.

'Such an arrangement would simplify matters wonderfully,' said Mr Tresham, turning to Sophia and laughing. 'But I fear that you would hardly be prepared to go to Mexico, so that we should be deprived of his services there.'

'There's no knowing. We will settle that point afterwards.'

After a little more conversation Mr Tresham took his leave, and returned home to join Maynard at dinner.

'I have a message from Lord Littmass, asking me to call on him this evening,' said James. 'I suppose that there is no fear of his raising any objection to my having the permanent appointment; because it is only on the strength of that appointment that I can ask what I have to ask of him.'

'If it will strengthen your hands I do not mind telling you that in reality his lordship's connection with the company is little more than nominal. I mean that, although its success will be to his advantage, yet its failure will not cost him sixpence.'

In answer to Maynard's look of surprise and inquiry he added, drily,—

'The Social and the Commercial are sometimes curiously intermingled in this country.' After a pause he continued,—

'I have just been calling on some warm friends of yours.'

'Of mine!'

'Yes, though you scarcely know them; and the best of it is, that they are connected with Lord Littmass, and have influence with him. I mean Lady and Miss Bevan.'

'I have met the latter once or twice, but I can hardly claim acquaintance with either.'

'Well, they know a good deal about you, and your history, and your—family; and are quite prepared to espouse your cause with Lord Littmass.'

'I remember,' said James; 'Miss Bevan set me wondering what she meant by saying she knew my family. And I came to the conclusion that it was a mere phrase, seeing that I myself know nothing whatever on the subject.'

'And you have never cared to ascertain?'

'Ascertain what?'

Why, for instance, who and what your father was, or your mother,—and——'

And of whom, pray, should I have made these inquiries?'

'Certainly, that information ought to have been vouchsafed

to you long ago; say, when you came of age, if not sooner Perhaps the absence of all interest on your part may have operated to prevent any communication being made to you.'

'I certainly have not given a thought to the subject. I can remember no one in whom, as a child, I took any interest, and have always stuck to my work, supposing that if there was anything I ought to know, I should know it without doing anything about it myself. Perhaps I was wrong, but the detached life I have always led is not of the kind to make a man think about personal associations. I found myself in the world, much as Adam did, and I don't suppose he ever thought of asking who his father was.'

'Yet I am disposed to think that if Adam had been blest with a guardian who could have enlightened him on the subject, he would have at least asked him.'

'Can it be possible,' exclaimed James, suddenly, 'that it is his knowledge of my parents that makes Lord Littmass object to my marrying Miss Waring? Yet he himself told me, or rather implied to me, that being a great heiress, he expected her to make a great marriage.'

'Being Lord Littmass's heiress would not entitle any young lady to make a great marriage on the score of fortune,' observed the old man, quietly. 'I rather think it must be your parentage."

'Can you tell me anything about my parents?'

'There is but one person who can with propriety do that.'

'Ought I to ask him before I make my proposal?'

'Well, my dear sir, if you really desire my opinion on the course to be pursued, I shall be most happy to state it. You have a certain proposition to make to your late guardian, the importance of which you rate above all other considerations. You have delicately refrained from advancing this proposition until you should have attained a position which justifies you in doing so. Knowing now of no obstacle, you make your proposal, stating that the only obstacle, of the existence of which you were aware, being removed, you now venture to come forward and prefer your claim. It will then be for him to accept or refuse, or to refer you to the lady to decide. If all goes well, I should not, in my own case, seek to open any fresh subject, but should leave well alone. If, unhappily, your proposal meets with a rebuff in the first instance from his lordship himself, and he declines to refer you to the lady, you have an undoubted

right to ask his reasons. He may decline to give them. You may then insist on being informed whether his objection is to yourself, your position, your fortune, or your parentage; and may demand to know who you are. He can scarcely, it seems to me, decline, at such a juncture, to afford information on this point. But should he do so, you risk nothing by stating that you shall draw your own inferences from his silence, and shall at once take means to verify them, still considering yourself at liberty to seek for an answer from the young lady herself.'

'I go with you in all but the last suggestion but one. What reason have I to suppose that the discovery would be more injurious to him than to myself?'

'I am supposing you to have pressed him so urgently, that it is unlikely he would still be in a disposition to withhold his information for the sake of sparing your feelings; and that therefore it is for his own sake.'

'Your reasoning is logical, though the conclusion leaves me in the dark.'

'Well, help me to finish this claret, and then you must be setting off. I shall await your return most anxiously.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Lady Bevan and Sophia had another visitor that afternoon. It wanted but a little of dinner-time when Lord Littmass drove up to their door and inquired for them. Entering the drawing-room with a brisk, cheerful air, he made an excuse for his backwardness in welcoming them to town, expressed his satisfaction at being able to snatch a few minutes from his engagements to see them, and said that he hoped to be quite at their service on the following day, when he expected to be relieved from the press of business that had of late engrossed him.

'My ward, too,' he continued, 'will then be quite prepared to extend her allegiance and affection to—to—may I say her aunt and cousin?' said he, looking inquiringly towards Sophia.

'You may indeed,' exclaimed that young lady, with a rapidity and decision that astonished and somewhat alarmed him. However, he went on,—

'Only you will excuse her being a little *distraite* and preoccupied at the commencement of her new intercourse. For the fact is,' he said, sinking his voice, 'she is a good deal worried at being obliged to exercise her decision, for the first time in her life, and to break with her old friend and playmate. I feared at one time that I should have had to warn him off the course, as it were; for there are many reasons why such a marriage is inadmissible. But I am rejoiced to find that, although she has a natural regard for him as an old and almost only friend at all near her own age, the prospect of any closer connection with him is entirely repugnant to her. He, on his part, is unable to accept such decision, except direct from herself; and he is therefore coming this evening to receive his dismissal at her own lips. I am, of course, much grieved for his disappointment, but think that he has behaved very foolishly in contemplating marriage at all. He is a mere student, a working man by nature, and one whose natural vocations are science and celibacy. It is just one of those cases in which "a young man married is a man that's marred." He has fine abilities, and all his own fortune to make.'

'And so Lord Littmass ran on, as if fearing to let another speak, and believing that Sophia was in ignorance of the secret of James Maynard's parentage. Had he been aware that it was no secret to her, he would as soon have entered a lion's den as encounter the vivacious indignation which he was too conscious she would not only feel, but express, at the part he was playing.

Neither of the ladies taking advantage of the brief pause in his speech to offer a remark, Lord Littmass resumed,—

'Now, poor James is not altogether a stranger to either of you, and I understand that you both have expressed some interest for him. Learning that young Mr Noel is a friend to him, I had some thoughts of getting him to use his influence to induce him to withdraw himself from inevitable mortification. But Mr Noel is at present abroad. Do you think that you could, between you, do something towards withdrawing him from his present pursuit, and influencing him into settling down to his real vocation? He goes but little into society; and, indeed, has but few acquaintances in London. Now, it occurs to me that if you can get him to come and visit you, the conversation of my lively young friend here will cause a diversion in his mind that it will be a real charity to bring about. To suggest something of this sort with respect to him is one of the objects I have at heart

just now. Another idea that has occurred to me relates to our esteemed young friend, Mr Edmund Noel. I can scarcely expect ladies to join me willingly in match-breaking, but in match-making they are rarely backward. Now, having observed both parties closely, I have attained a conviction that he and Margaret Waring are singularly suited to each other. You, my dear Miss Sophia, will have an opportunity of forming a judgment on this point after she returns with you to Devonshire; and if your verdict agrees with mine, I shall be sincerely grateful for any aid that you may give me in bringing about an intimacy between them.'

'I really cannot stay any longer now, Lord Littmass. Mamma will entertain you,' said Sophia, getting up abruptly from her seat, and running out of the room. She said afterwards that she was in such a rage with him, that she felt she could not listen any longer without swearing at him. Lady Bevan remarked, by way of apology, that Sophia had to dress for dinner, and added,—

'I have been anxious to see you, cousin, both because I have begun to feel that I ought sooner to have taken some notice of my poor sister's child, and because I feared that you were in some trouble or embarrassment. I hope you will always remember that you have a warm friend, as well as relative, in me; and that I have some little in my power in case of need. Now, tell me about the child. From what you said just now, I gather that she has much improved of late upon her former condition. Do you think that she will readily take to her late-found relations?

'I will answer for it. Any difficulties there may be will not be on that score. To-morrow morning I will send her, and you shall judge for yourselves. But really at present I must tear myself away. When I get the pressing business of the moment over, you shall know all I have to tell you. I venture to think it may be more, and more welcome, than you anticipate.'

And Lord Littmass left the house, murmuring to himself,—

'The first interview over; but how about the next? The danger is only postponed, not escaped. Harriet's words seemed to refer to money. Can she have heard or suspected anything? And what did Sophia's abrupt exit mean? Is she in love with young Noel? If so, I have indeed made a mess of it.'

And he returned home, to eat a hasty dinner and await James Maynard.

CHAPTER XXXV.

After he had dined, Lord Littmass retired to his study, there to occupy himself with his writing while awaiting James Maynard. He had meditated on the position, and decided that this would be a better plan than receiving him familiarly over his wine in the dining-room, or in a more formal manner in the drawing-room. Besides, it was advisable for Margaret to be in waiting in the latter, in case a reference to her should be found necessary.

Lord Littmass was fully conscious of the two apparently incongruous characters which united in him; so much so as sometimes to wonder which of them was the real and which the assumed. For he found it impossible to convince himself that there could be any identity between himself as Artist, and himself as Man of the world; and yet he was fain to confess that he was in heart and by turns thoroughly both. Of late he had inclined more and more to the conviction that he was intended by nature to be Artist solely, for he had found that the more involved his affairs became, and the blacker the future looked to him, the more he felt drawn to his work of creation; the more vivid grew his imagination, the keener his moral insight, the profounder the feelings he could depict, and the intenser the emotions he could evolve.

He had now reached a point in his work which claimed for its elaboration his whole undivided power. His imaginary characters had grown under his hand, from their earliest vague conception, to be creatures of warm flesh and blood, high intellect, genuine feeling. Allowing them freely to enact the parts to which their respective characters impelled them under circumstances which, though peculiar, were very possible, he found them now in such a situation that to extricate them from it had become a powerful incentive to his vanity as an Artist, if not to his humanity as a man.

To these hapless children of his latest creation, the exercise of whose inherent characters and freewill, amid the circumstances in which they had been placed by him, had brought them into entanglement apparently inextricable, his humanity, whether artistic or genuine, said,—

'Ye shall not sin or die! but shall come forth from the trial like gold refined. And this by the sole force, still ever operat-

ing, of your own natures. Not a jot of my Art will I sacrifice. For the Artist who abandons his art, and sacrifices his genius to Expedients, owns himself vanquished, and that by beings of his own formation.'

And this reflection aroused his vanity:—

'Shall men say that I, Lord Littmass, who have hitherto succeeded in my every tried enterprise of Art, have failed at last. Better death, and leave my work unfinished, my world in chaos, than fail thus. Ha! was this, then, the meaning of the Ancients in representing their gods as dying;—that, failing to carry the world they had made and the race they had cherished, onwards to their promised perfection, the Immortals compassed their own destruction, and died of mortified vanity?

'Little thought you, my Lucretius, how near you approached, in results at least, to the later dogmatists. Banish the gods, or kill them, and man is equally left to his own devices, is equally master of his own fate. Well, if the gods, or man's belief in them and in their powers of interference for his good, brought him to the pass, he was wise to let them go, and work out his salvation for himself.'

It was a habit with Lord Littmass to refer all matters connected with philosophy and theology to a vague antiquity. He had imbibed his principal knowledge of such subjects in his youth, and had come to associate them in his mind as kindred if not identical processes. He was now, according to his custom in all the more difficult situations to which the exercise of his art brought him, pen in hand, allowing his thoughts to run on, utterly heedless as to whither they carried him, trusting to some sparks being struck out at white heat, which might serve either as stars for guidance or as gems for adornment. In his present condition of mind and body, he felt his thoughts completely detached from his external circumstances; as once when, on inhaling ether for a slight though painful operation, he had, by preserving the clearness of his perceptions to the extreme verge of consciousness, been able to watch the gradual extinction of sensation in the extremities, and concentration of all life at the centre of his being; the heart beating more and more rapidly and fully as it seemed to draw the whole circulation into itself,—until the supreme moment when consciousness was merged in annihilation, thorough as that of death.

Lord Littmass seemed to have reached such a point of complete abstraction from the external world with which the ex-

tremities of his being ordinarily tingled, when, glancing up from his writing, he found James Maynard standing before him; looking, in the shaded light of his study lamp, oh, so like his own earlier self, that for the moment the years seemed to have rolled back, and he fancied he was gazing at his own reflection in a mirror. The thought shot to his heart, and almost escaped to his lips,—

'Mine indeed! Mine indeed!'

And whatever doubts he may have had before, from the moment of that glance they vanished.

Maynard was the first to speak, murmuring an apology for the imperceptibility of his entrance. Lord Littmass soon recovered his presence of mind, and, motioning him to a chair, expressed himself at his service.

'You have travelled far since we last met, and have done good work. I hoped to have heard of the results first from your own lips.'

'Your lordship was absent from town——'

'True, and you followed me to Devonshire.'

'Scarcely so. Failing to find your lordship in London, I went to Devonshire for a purpose that I cherish more dearly than life, and——'

'And accomplished it?'

'And missed it—for the time. Your lordship knows how and why.'

'And now?'

'And now, having gained the confidence of those to whom your lordship recommended me and who entrusted me with their commission, and having been placed in a position of emolument and independence, I venture to ask permission to pay my addresses to your lordship's ward, Miss Margaret Waring, with a view to her accompanying me to Mexico as my wife.'

'May I ask, have you any reason to suppose that, if I grant the permission you seek, she will accept you?'

'I say frankly, I have no means of judging.'

'So that you have not taken advantage of your acquaintance with her to gain her affections?'

'I meant to imply that I do not know that I have gained them. That I have wished and tried to gain them I do not deny. Our intercourse, whenever we have met, has, on her side, been as that of brother and sister. So far as I am aware, she is as much of a child in heart now as ever, and any inti-

mations which I may have thrown out regarding my own hopes and wishes have fallen unheeded and uncomprehended. But with your good permission I trust now to speak to her more plainly and effectively.

'And if I decline to give it?'

'Your lordship will scarcely do so without at least allowing her an opportunity of deciding her own fate.'

'Pray, have you any recollection of a conversation I held with you shortly before you left England, in which I used the phrase "fine prospects," in relation to her?'

'Perfectly, and of the agony it caused me, as indicating an unsuspected barrier between us?'

'And has anything occurred to induce you to suppose that that barrier no longer exists?'

'My best reply is that I am ready to take her, and renounce all fortune, save that which I may win for her.'

'It seems to me that in contemplating such an arrangement, you are thinking of no one beyond yourself.'

'Give me leave to address her, and I promise that unless I succeed in winning her to such a love as will be the crowning happiness of both our lives,—a love in comparison with which all else is worthless,—I will abandon my pursuit, and do my best to reconcile myself to my bitter disappointment.'

'If I do not stop to comment on the undesirableness of such a future as you offer to this tenderly-nurtured girl—a future in which a life in Mexico and a precarious income constitute the principal features,—it is that I may not be exciting hopes which must never be realised. James Maynard, you can never, while I live, marry Margaret Waring.'

The firm, solemn, and decided tone in which these words were uttered, convinced Maynard that they were intended to be final. Tightly grasping the arm of his chair, he gasped for breath, and for an instant attempted in vain to articulate.

Lord Littmass perceived his agitation, and enjoyed a momentary triumph of superiority. But soon his admiration was excited by the manner in which James mastered his emotion, and, recovering himself, said, with a dignity and firmness even exceeding his own,—

'Then I have only at present to ask your lordship's reasons.'

It was Lord Littmass's turn to be moved.

'My reasons!' he exclaimed; and then, yielding to sarcasm, said,—

'Do you know that, on searching my memory, I am unable to recall a single instance of my ever having given reasons for my actions.'

This answer was a mistake, and Lord Littmass at once saw that it was so, and, mentally registering the first point in the game to his opponent, he determined to avoid a similar slip in the future. Had anything been wanting to confirm Maynard's determination, this answer would have supplied it.

'My lord,' he said, in the firmest and most respectful tone, 'the conduct of a man must ever change with circumstances. It has never before happened to you to be called on to decide the fate of one who is bound to you by no less a tie than that of life-long protection, when pleading for all that he values in life. You have never, therefore, had the same motives for giving your reasons which will now induce you to satisfy me.'

'Nevertheless, I must still decline.'

'The emergency is one that confers on me the right to know them. They may be founded on something disparaging to my character: some injurious suspicion which I have a right to dispel.'

'The conversation to which I have already alluded, if rightly apprehended, seems to me to supply what you seek, without conjuring up groundless or painful imaginations. I have other views for my ward.'

Maynard did not immediately reply, and Lord Littmass finding him silent, thought that he was bringing himself to abandon his purpose, and so continued, in a softer tone,—

'With regard to yourself, too, I had other hopes. I have seen for some time past that you were pre-occupied, and you may remember that I more than once let fall suggestions in reference to your prospects, in the hope of leading you to perceive the very great mistake you make in thinking at all of marriage. Your whole career in life depends upon the unwavering persistency with which you pursue your studies and your labours. Marriage, whether happy or unhappy in itself, can only be to you a hindrance and a damage. You are not the man I have taken you for if you seek to free yourself from the necessity of working, by means of a wealthy alliance. Your disposition is altogether too noble for that. I have pleased myself by looking forward to the time when your name will rank high among England's worthies, who have forsaken all minor ambitions for the love of science, and are looked up to as

the leaders and benefactors of their kind. Even this agency in Mexico, lucrative as there is a possibility, more or less remote, of its proving, does not content me as a permanency for you. But I considered that, as you are yet young, a few years would not be ill spent in acquiring a little capital, with which you may return to devote yourself to your real work, the work of scientific investigation, for which your character and position so eminently fit you. Nay,—hear me out—any man can marry. Your special gift lies in another direction. For a man to abandon a special gift, and devote himself to the commonplace, is to bury his genius in the ground, and to waste God's greatest blessing, by depriving himself and mankind of the benefits of its exercise. I consider it better for that man had he never been born.'

'Your lordship kindly endeavours, by flattering language, to neutralise the painful effect of your resolution. But I must claim the liberty of demurring to the accuracy of such a view of marriage, at least in my own case. Neither should I consider myself justified in burdening you with the responsibility of enacting the part of a providence to decide the question that of all most deeply affects my whole existence. I have grown up, my lord, in frequent and intimate intercourse with my fellow orphan and ward. I have watched the growth of her mind and character, and have done my best to aid in their development. I believe that her affections are entirely free, but that she has too much regard for me lightly to subject me to the pain of a refusal. And I confidently trust that, if allowed to address her, I shall succeed in converting her assent into a warmer feeling. True love is apt to be contagious; and that my love is true, my whole life to its inmost depths bears witness. I regret the necessity that compels me to take up a position antagonistic to your wishes, and I ask pardon for my share in it, but I claim for myself and for her whom I love, the right of being the arbiters of our own destinies.'

'You are very persistent,' said Lord Littmass, pettishly.

'A man is apt to be persistent when pleading for his life. How much more so when pleading for what he values more than life,—his whole chance of happiness here and hereafter. Think, I pray you, my lord, of how little worth are all these plans and views which you have formed for Margaret or for myself; of how little avail these social ambitions of the world, if bought by the sacrifice of precious hopes, and all that endears

life to us. I know not whether you have undergone similar experiences in your own history; whether your life has had its share of the hopes and joys which men prize so dearly; or whether disappointment came early to steel your heart against the indulgence of all such feelings: but as a man, and one, moreover, possessed of more than ordinary insight respecting the emotional phenomena of humanity, you cannot persist in opposing your own merely speculative plans,—plans preconceived without reference to the feelings of those most concerned,—to such considerations as I am now urging upon you.'

While he was thus speaking Lord Littmass was reflecting.

'If only I could trust Margaret to refuse him, firmly and decidedly, I would relieve myself of the necessity. But he talks too well. A woman's ear is her weakest point, and the very power which he shows in addressing me is the strongest reason against letting him see her.'

So he said,—

'I cannot tell you how disappointed and humiliated I feel at the position in which I find myself placed by your conduct. I had hoped that in all these years you would have learned to appreciate my position and character sufficiently to believe that only a strong sense of duty would govern my decisions. It is no pleasure to me to withstand the wishes of any in whom I take an interest. I endeavoured long ago by delicate means to intimate to you the hopelessness of your growing attachment, without betraying to you that I more than suspected its existence; but you did not think proper to act on the suggestion, and arrest the course of your feelings before they attained their present strength.'

'My lord,' interrupted Maynard, 'those feelings have ever been a part of myself. I cannot remember the time when they were not, in some degree. They have grown with my growth and strengthened with my strength, until it has come to this:—that Margaret is my fate, and I cannot surrender my hope of winning her at any one's bidding, save her own.'

'Then the sooner the matter is settled, the better,' said Lord Littmass, with the air of a man who, at the end of a desperate game, finally produces the winning card; and, rising from his seat, he proceeded to the door. But there he stopped, and added,—

'Before I subject her to the pain of choosing between us, I will make one more appeal to your better feeling. Are you

resolved, at all hazard, to set yourself against me in this matter, and to count as nothing the years of care that I have exercised over you from your earliest childhood,—throwing to the winds all ties of gratitude and duty for the sake of forcing this girl to be your wife; dragging from me the sole bright ray of my house, in order to immure her in a Mexican mine? Speak!'

'My lord,' said James, nettled by the light estimate thus coolly placed upon the advantages of a marriage with him, 'before I can fairly compute the extent of gratitude and self-sacrifice due to you from me, I must be enlightened as to the motives which have prompted your benevolence. Who am I?'

The suddenness with which this unexpected question was put, almost overcame Lord Littmass's self-possession. He staggered and leant against the door, regarding Maynard with a strange and wistful look. But he did not speak at once. Totally unprepared for the inquiry, he had framed no reply in anticipation. But his favourite maxim stood him in good need: 'When in doubt, hold your tongue.'

Maynard repeated his question.

'I ask your lordship, who was my father?'

His answer came forth in a measured and wondering tone,—

'Nearly thirty years of age, and never asked the question before!'

The sarcasm of this reply, intense as it was, failed to shake James's serenity. He said, quietly,—

'Add, since I was a child. If in later years I have shown any unnatural indifference on such a subject, it is because my interest was early chilled and repressed by yourself. The faculty of personal attachment for friend or relative was never cultivated in me, whether for any or for what reason is best known to yourself. I, so far at least, have only done justice to your teaching. I do not deny, however, that, notwithstanding my failure to comprehend your motives, such was my confidence that you would do whatever was right, and tell me at a fitting time, that I have refrained from putting the interrogation, until compelled now by this crisis of my fate.'

'Why, how can the knowledge help you?'

'Thus. It may reveal to me whether the balance of duty owed is due from your side or from mine; whether it is you or I that have the best claim to the forbearance of the other; whether, in requiring my abandonment of Margaret, you are claiming a sacrifice fairly due to you, or are adding a new and

a greater item to the catalogue of charges which I may fairly bring against you on my own behalf.'

'Do you say this without having the slightest idea as to your origin?' asked Lord Littmass, in a hoarse tone, and speaking very slowly.

James started to hear his altered voice, and glancing keenly at him, was shocked to note his haggard look. He answered,—

'It is as I have already said. I have forborne to seek information, trusting to you to tell me at the fitting moment.'

By this time Lord Littmas had returned to his chair, and Maynard, who had risen when he rose, remained standing.

'And now you expect me to give you information for the express purpose of employing it as a weapon against myself. Hear this, James Maynard. If I have never broached the subject of your parentage to living being, it has been solely from a sincere regard to the best interests of all concerned. Supposing that a doubt rested on the fair fame of one or both of your parents, was it any duty of mine to subject you to the pain of knowing it, or to the stigma of having it known? Or, supposing that, owing to family intricacies, it were doubtful as to who really was your father, was it not a thousand times better to bury the doubt in oblivion, and leave you to make a name for yourself, undisturbed by useless regrets about events long past and persons long dead? That friendships of my own were involved in such history should be clear to you, from the fact of the relations which have so long existed between us. If in these relations I have sometimes suffered bitter memories to come between us and infuse a degree of coldness into our intercourse, it has been owing to no fault of yours, and I ask your pardon. Yes,' he repeated, with singular feebleness and slowness, as if almost incapable of speech, 'I . . . ask . . . your . . . pardon,' and, exhausted by the struggle, sank back in his chair.

Maynard sprang forward in alarm, and proffered his aid, but Lord Littmass desired him, in a whisper, to sit down and wait, as the attack would soon pass off. After a little while he began to rally, and then he smiled a smile that seemed ghastly to James, and said, still in a soft, low voice,—

'No one but you has ever witnessed this weakness of mine. I cannot talk to you more now. If you still persist in the course you have taken, come to-morrow, by noon, and I will consider how far I can meet you.'

Not liking to leave him in that condition, James lingered,

and begged to be allowed to call a servant, but receiving for answer, accompanied by an impatient gesture, only the words—

'No, no, go; only go,' he had no choice but to take his leave.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

After Maynard's departure, Lord Littmas continued to lie back motionless in his chair, until partially recovered from his exhaustion. His first conscious impulse was to curse the weakness that compelled him to leave the contest to be decided another day; but presently he reflected that, after all, the attack had occurred at a fortunate crisis, as it had obtained for him a respite which he could employ in re-forming his plans.

Then, remembering the directions he had given to Margaret, he rang for the servant to tell her that he had no need to see her that evening, and that she might retire to her room.

'I shall not require anything more to-night,' he added; and shortly the whole house was asleep, save only its master, who sat alone in his study, leaning back in his writing-chair, the chair in which he had written the works which had gained his fame; and with the last pages before him of his new book, the book upon which he relied to eclipse all that even he had as yet achieved.

As he sat musing, the sentences which he had last written caught his eye and riveted his attention. And he thought,—

'If these natures, so noble and so pure, are yet doomed to such extremity of woe, wherefore should I expect a happier fate for myself?'

Here his fingers mechanically closed upon his pen, and the habit being strong, while he thought, he unconsciously wrote,—

'How will it end? how will it end? Death, death, art thou then indeed sole solver of life's problems? Methinks I can baffle thee yet.'

And suddenly remembering the cordial which his doctor had bidden him keep ever at hand, and which, on the last occasion of his using it, he had placed in the drawer of his writing-table, he sought for it, and placing the vial to his lips, swallowed a dose so powerful as at first to take away his breath, and alarm

him lest he had poisoned himself. Presently the dram took the expected effect, and sent a glow through his whole system, causing his heart to beat with renewed vigour, and his brain to throb with creative energy. He seized his pen, and his fingers could scarcely go fast enough to keep pace with the ideas that thronged upon him. He exercised no control over their direction, but was surprised to find that instead of working in the course of his book, or inciting him to antagonistic feelings towards the agents of his embarrassments, they crowded upon him in the form of a rapid vision of quite another kind of life than that which he had lived, yet one that it now seemed to him the easiest possible life for him to have lived,—one that, had he only been upright and true, would have brought him happiness and contentment. There rose before him, as in a vision, a loving wife, a bright home, glad noble children, in whose growing characters and abilities he could have taken a pride, and a consciousness of the highest and sweetest aims in a far healthier and higher class of writings.

'My wife,'—his pen ran on, he unknowing what it wrote, or even that it was writing,—'yes, she was good and true, until her moral being was destroyed by me. I must not lay the failure of my life to her charge. Ah! had I but to live my years over again! but now it is too late to redeem the past. I am well nigh worn out. The task, nay the joy, of leading a better life must be left to others. I can only conceive it. Its execution is beyond me. I have wasted my opportunity, little dreaming of a time when I should call upon my heart and brain to continue their functions, if only for the purpose of affording me space to work out a higher ideal of life, and should call upon them in vain! And so, and so, it comes at last. The summer is past. The harvest is ended; and I—I am not—— Oh, James! James! my son! my son!'

And his head drooped forward upon his left arm as it rested on his paper; and for a time he had neither the heart nor the will to raise it again. When at length he lifted it, it was with a wild eager look, showing that in the hallucination of the moment he thought that James was still there.

'You will forgive me, will you not? No longer will I be absorbed in myself. Acknowledge me to be your father, as I at last acknowledge you to be my son. Pity me, James. The world thinks me rich. I am a pauper. Worse. I am in debt. The world honours me. Yet I am a villain. The world

believes me childless. You are my son. While to the world I was rich, honoured, but childless, I was miserable. I knew not how miserable until now. Now, poor, dishonoured, but with you, I shall learn happiness. Old age has come upon me in a moment. I can stand alone no longer. Pity your old father. I swore you should never bear my name or rank, for I believed you to be not mine. But now I see differently. I see myself in you. Not my bad, old self; but the better self I had in me—and kept there.

'Silent still? You renounce me as a father? Oh, I hear your voice, so low, yet so hard to me. Or are they your thoughts which I hear? Yes, yes, I will write them all down.

'"Peer, peerless in dishonour. Artist of an ideal which your real life laughs to scorn. Childless you have chosen to live. Childless you will die. Never will I bear your name or rank. Never with your fame adorn my career. Never yours with mine. Renounced all these years as your son; acknowledged only to be deprived of my dearest hopes, I refuse to accept you now, or own you as my father."

'Yes, James, you are right, quite right to be proud and hard. I was proud and hard once, and you have it from me. It would be a condescension, a great condescension in you, to own me now. And we don't condescend in our family, until we are old and broken,—as I am now, James. Yet I thought you better than I ever was. I hope, James, I shall not live to disgrace you long. It was only pride that kept me from owning you. You understand that now. It was no fault of yours. I was too proud to let myself be put right. My pride made me refuse to let you marry Margaret. I was too proud to acknowledge myself wrong by owning you; and too proud to let my son marry under a false name. I did not mean to rob Margaret of her fortune. I thought she would soon die, and it would be mine by right. I thought then that I might replace it. Remember how proud I was, and think how impossible it was for me, being so proud, to tell the world I was a pauper. This is not all, James. I have deceived everybody; and to-morrow everybody will know it. For I cannot conceal the truth longer. But you will not be hard on me. You will hide me from them, so that I may not see their scornful triumph. But for a little while, James, a little while.'

And ceasing for a moment to write, he glared round the room. Presently his pen dashed on again.

'Gone! gone! without one word, without staying till I had finished speaking to him! Perhaps he is still within hearing, and will return at my call. James! James! I feel that this is killing me. Go, then, and tell your Margaret that my death is your marriage licence.'

And once more his head fell upon his arm; and there it remained. For the stimulant that sustained him had evaporated, and his delirium had given place to numbness. The neglected fire had gone out, and the bitter November night had entered the room; and there was no latent heat to promote vital re-action. So there Lord Littmass remained, still grasping the pen with which he had learnt to feel for his thoughts;—the pen that had recorded his last agonising vision on the sheets of paper which lay strewn around;—until the morning came, when the servants entered the room, and found him dead!

END OF PART I.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

SOPHIA BEVAN TO EDMUND NOEL.

'Linnwood, North Devon.

'You are a good child to write directly you got to the destination to which you have been so mysteriously and unseasonably spirited away; though I haven't half forgiven you yet for going. But I have so much to tell you that I cannot stop to scold you properly. The tangle out of which you so timely escaped, leaving us all to our fates, was unravelled in the saddest manner, not twelve hours after you left London, by the sudden death of Lord Littmass.

'A day which must have been one of intense worry to him was wound up by a most painful interview with Mr Maynard, who, on being refused leave to address Margaret, suddenly demanded to know who his father was. It was then that Lord Littmass first showed the signs of the malady of which he must soon after have died. He sent Mr Maynard away, telling him to call the next day, and forbade him to summon any assistance. The only other person who saw him alive was the servant for whom he rang to tell Margaret that she need not sit up longer. He told the man that he should want nothing more that night; and so they all went to bed, leaving him alone in his study, far away from help.

'He must have remained for some hours thinking over the events of the day, and the inevitable discovery which must soon

be made of his affairs, which have turned out to be in a shocking state; and this, combined with the interview with his son, seems to have worked him up into a pitch of frenzy,—judging by the sad and extraordinary train of thought which took possession of his pen at the last moment. Edmund, this old man must have died alone and *mad*, with a houseful of servants at call, and he must have been driven mad by the contemplation of his own life. I have cried myself almost blind over the memorials of his last hours. Everybody does not understand them as I do. He had taken a very strong stimulant after James left him, which set his *heart* on fire, as well as his brain. They thought at first, when the empty vial was found, that he had purposely poisoned himself, and that there must be an inquest. But the doctor said that he had only taken an overdose of a cordial which he had told him to keep at hand in case of any faintness coming on, for that his heart was his weak point; and so he was published as having "died after a short illness, of disease of the heart;" and the papers, commenting on the event, have extolled him as an author who put himself into his books, and wrote from his heart until he expended his very vitality for the public advantage.

'But I was going to say that he must in his madness or delirium have mistaken his ideas for realities, and his written thoughts for uttered words. He evidently fancied that his son was in the room, long after he had gone, and that he was conversing with him. And it is this fancied conversation that he has written down. In it he repents of his whole past life, and owns Mr Maynard, whom he affectionately calls "James," to be his son.

'You would think that this recognition was enough to justify Mr Maynard in assuming his father's name and title. But not a certificate or scrap of paper of any kind has been found to prove either Lord Littmass's marriage, or the birth of his child; and it is doubtful whether, even if that can be proved, there is any way of establishing the son's right to the succession. The difficulty was first started by the question as to who should take out letters of administration, for there is no will. Mr Maynard was very averse to acting as nearest of kin on so recent a notice of the fact, and after a discussion with the lawyers, in which he said that he was by no means disposed to assume the double burden of his father's rank and debts, and preferred keeping his old name and style, it was arranged that

mamma should act as her cousin's executor. It is a great undertaking, but her solicitor in London, and your kind uncle, promised to take all the trouble upon themselves. And so, being left free, we returned home bringing my new cousin—(for mamma was quite satisfied that nurse Partridge's tale is true, even before she saw the register of the marriage);—and we promise to be so happy together, that I quite dread Mr Maynard's accepting our invitation to spend Christmas here, lest he should take Margaret away from us again. He is bent on returning to Mexico as soon as he can, and only waits for her to make up her mind. How it will end I don't know; but when a man is determined and a woman isn't, he generally gets his own way. I think it is your reading of the saying, that "She who hesitates is *won*." One thing I am sure of, she is not the least bit in love. She has confessed to me that she likes his letters better than himself. She is so much of a child that she does not know how to exert her own will; yet so much of a woman, that she rather prefers doing what she dislikes, as it is more like duty:—which is just what you always laugh at me for. It is to be hoped that she will not marry on this principle; though under the circumstances, entirely dependent as she is on her aunt, (and on me, for I mean to help,) it may be right for her to marry any decent man who can keep her. But I don't want to lose her yet.

'I hope you will manage to be here when Mr Maynard comes. With one lover to two women I shall be sadly put about to manage without you. I suppose your business at Carnac will not detain you long. I heard all about it once from a friend of papa's, who told me that it is an old Druidical burial-ground, deriving its name from *Carne*, or rather from the same root that the Latin word came from. Mr Maynard, however, says it probably has an astronomical significance, and owes its eleven lines of stones to the time when there were but eleven constellations in the Zodiac. Please settle the question as soon as you can by digging up some bones, or some stars! and then come back to us.

'Ever yours affectionately,

'S. B.'

A still more potent influence exerted itself to cut Noel's sojourn at Auray (the village in which he lodged during his visit to Carnac) shorter than he wished. The wildness of the

country, the primitive good nature of the Bretagne peasantry, and the glorious seas which under pressure of winter gales rolled in from the Atlantic within easy reach of his quarters, combined with the work, in which he was taking great delight, to make his time pass exceedingly pleasantly.

It was a letter from Mr Tresham, saying, that a bank in San Francisco, in which he was very largely interested, had entered upon a course of speculation which appeared to him to be of so hazardous a character, that he wanted such special and reliable information as could only be given by a trustworthy agent upon the spot; and that Edmund, if he would undertake the commission, should have a handsome recompense for his trouble. The letter concluded by saying, that as he was his uncle's heir both by nature and by affection, the practical knowledge to be gained by such an expedition would prove most valuable to him in the future; and held out the prospect of a series of enjoyable visits to various countries bordering on the Pacific, in which Mr Tresham possessed interests. Only, if he would go, no time must be lost.

Noel went rapidly through the conflicting currents of reflection usual on the receipt of an offer that involves an important step in life. He had nothing to keep him in England but his snug Devonshire property and his newly adopted literary occupation. His uncle would look after the former and cultivate his neighbours at Linnwood at the same time; and the latter, if he could get his present paper finished, would be none the worse for the additional experiences of extended travel.

His deliberations were soon completed, and he answered his uncle's proposition by presenting himself at his house in London. To his delight Maynard was still there, Mr Tresham having insisted on his making his home with him whenever he should be in London. Under James's supervision Noel's new materials were soon satisfactorily digested and embodied in his article; James undertaking the correction of the proofs. A hasty farewell was despatched to Sophia Bevan, which,—in consequence of a certain shrinking from her exuberant expressions of regret at his departure, mingled, as they would be sure to be, with friendly reproaches at his taking such a step without consulting her and telling her all about it beforehand,—he delayed posting until it was too late to receive an answer, and Noel sailed for New York within ten days of his first receiving his uncle's proposal.

Now Edmund Noel, although rejoicing to a certain extent at escaping the affectionate tyranny that Sophia's friendship would have imposed upon him in the shape of the aforesaid regrets and reproaches, no sooner found himself out of their reach than he felt somewhat ashamed of himself for permitting the existence of such a feeling in respect of a friend of whose genuine unselfish regard he had no doubt whatever. And he blamed the fastidiousness of his disposition which caused him to depreciate or slight anything so precious in itself as the interest taken in him by a true, clever, and high-minded woman simply because it was expressed with more animation than it was in his own nature to exhibit. He was not one of those men who rejected all self-examination and self-correction, saying, 'It's no use; I am made so, and can't alter myself.' But he had his ideal of life and character, and deemed it his business to conform to that ideal as far as he possibly could. And in instituting a comparative mental anatomy between himself and Sophia, his conclusions were, just now at least, not always in his own favour. If intensity was with her accompanied by loudness or demonstrativeness, might it not be that he was deficient in the force requisite for exertion in two such opposite directions? So he reasoned himself into believing that hers was a case in which demonstrativeness, so far from indicating a lack of intensity, rather proceeded from a superabundance of force, and tutored himself into regretting the sensitiveness which caused the combination to jar upon him.

He felt additional self-reproach when the mail that reached San Francisco a month after his arrival, brought him a letter from her with just the proper proportion of affectionate regrets, and not a word more than he liked. At that distance from home and all his friends he learned to welcome eagerly any token of affection, without a thought of fastidious scrutiny as to the manner in which it might be conveyed. The letter ran thus:—

'My dearest Boy,

'You have made a terrible hole in my life by taking yourself off, or rather the Fates have made it, and I won't blame you; but only beg you to do what you have to do and come quickly back again. Luckily I have had plenty to keep me from fretting; and don't be cross at my saying that I have learnt to appreciate you better than I ever did when you were here; and

it is all owing to my new cousin Margaret, who is living with us at Linnwood. Think what a Power this little girl must be when she has worked such a revolution in me as to make me esteem Being above Doing! You remember how we used to fight about this. Well, I give in, converted,—not by you, sir, but by her angelic nature. Mind, I don't say that you are one-millionth part as good as she is, but there is just enough of resemblance to show me the meaning of you.

'On account of Lord Littmass's death, and Margaret and James (as he is to be my cousin too, I shall take this liberty for short,) being with us, we didn't have our usual Christmas party. But your uncle came in your place, and made himself quite a dear, especially with mamma. In fact everybody was busy, except poor me. For James would hardly speak to me, but made himself miserable about Margaret, with whom he is miles and miles deep in love, till I think he will never come up again. And she, poor thing, bears it like an angel, or, what is better, a woman, and does her best to persuade him that she must be naturally cold in manner, and that he must not fancy that her absence of demonstrativeness is owing to any want of affection for him. I hope it may prove so when they are married and thrown upon each other for almost all the society they are likely to have in Mexico, whither they are to go next month, soon after the wedding. Duty and love are admirable qualities to be united, but when the woman is governed solely by her ideas of the one, and the man is under the exclusive influence of the other, the results are apt to be anything but harmonious. So far, her behaviour in a really trying position has been perfectly beautiful. Teachable as a child, and deferring to him in all intellectual matters, she has even a stronger and deeper moral nature than he has. The man whom she marries will find her devoted to his best interests, however weak and foolish he may be; and she will hoodwink the world as to his faults, herself bearing all in silence. But woe to him if she find him mean or wicked, for she could not abide with him. She would leave him, and would die reproaching herself for having left him.

'James has not seen his father's last writings. They are of so painful a character, and show so prophetic an insight into the characters of Margaret and others whom he has taken for his models, that the solicitor advised mamma to let nobody see them but me. As you are so far away, I don't mind telling you that Lord Littmass actually wanted to secure *you* for his

ward. The whole tenor of his last writings shows that he anticipated evil from her marrying James, and thought that you would suit her better. And, the very day he died, he made a formal proposal to your uncle for you! I cannot help thinking that it is very odd you should never have seen her—I mean close enough to see her face. It is as if fate were determined to keep you apart until too late to affect your respective destinies. First, you missed her by going to France at the critical moment of Lord Littmass's death, when you would certainly have seen her with us had you stayed in London; and, next, you are whisked away to the Pacific when I wanted you to come and see her here.

'Who knows what might have happened had you been here now? We might have changed all round, and everybody been a gainer. At any rate I should have got a few words now and then with James, a thing now out of the question. I know you have a great respect for engagements, and hold them almost too sacred to be broken. I hold only actual marriage to be sacred, and consider an engagement as a sort of trial to see whether people suit each other; and think that, if they don't, it is a kindness to part them before it is too late. I am just thinking that if you don't return so very soon, it won't be very much out of your way to call at Mexico and see the young couple in their silver mine. They expect to be settled there some time in March.'

This letter only made Noel more glad than before that he had not seen Margaret. Sensitively delicate as his mind was, he had always felt a twinge of remorse for the accident that had revealed her to him when bathing, and he dreaded lest by any chance allusion or irresistible joke, Sophia should make her aware of the circumstance. The curious remarks by which this news of Lord Littmass's strange proposal was accompanied made the omission to see her a matter of positive rejoicing to him. For though he felt himself incapable of treachery to James, yet there were incidents in his career which had taught him how easily things go wrong, and that mischief was a thing always possible; and he would not for the world give his friend cause for uneasiness.

'So, after all,' he said to himself, 'this expedition of mine has turned up just in the nick of time, for I must have gone to Devonshire had I remained in England. I should like to see

those last writings of Lord Littmass's, though. What an artist he was! What could he have done with his money?—he must have made many thousands by his books. And what an enviable power of abstraction to be able to write as he did, with such catastrophe of character and fortune impending. Maynard is Lord Littmass now. I don't doubt he will claim his rank some day, if he gets rich, or has a son. By the way, he is making but a poor marriage, so far as money goes. By Jupiter! could this have been Sophia's hinted thought,—that if I had been there she might have induced him to give up Margaret to me as a more suitable match, and take her and her fortune, and make her Lady Littmass? It must be so. What a sharp girl she is: yet so thoroughly good, that, desirable as such an arrangement might appear to her, she would not encourage the idea unless she conscientiously believed it to be the best for all concerned. I suppose it is her own baffled maternal instinct which urges her so to enact the part of a Providence to her friends. Her letter is not written in her usual boisterous spirits.'

CHAPTER II.

Once launched into the busy commercial world of the great and rising emporium of Western America and the North Pacific, Noel threw himself heartily into the business before him. By dint of pushing, untiring investigation he achieved all that his uncle wanted, and more than he expected of him. Bringing to bear upon the immediate object of his mission the lofty code of an English gentleman's honour, he declined to listen to a word that implied a lower principle of action for the counting-house and board-room; and backed as he was known to be by the power of Mr Tresham's name, he succeeded, though not without having to use threats of withdrawing the whole of his uncle's capital, in arresting the dangerous career of the house to which he had been accredited, and forcing it back to steadier courses.

It was true that the immediate profits of the concern were necessarily diminished by the action thus imposed upon it, but almost certain ruin was averted thereby. And when, about a year after his arrival, a crash came, and one great house after

another was laid low, the bank which he had saved not only kept its head high, but established amid the surrounding ruins a sounder credit and more profitable business than it had ever before enjoyed, or than was possible under the old system.

Noel himself derived considerable interest from noting the fallacy of the notion which he had all his life been accustomed to hear propounded as an indubitable axiom, and which had been applied to himself by Sophia Bevan, and not by her alone. This was the notion that men of imagination and principles are by the very constitution of their minds incapacitated for the conduct of practical life. Noel did not feel quite certain about the truth of this dictum, though he had more faith in Sophia's penetration than in that of the others who propounded it, but he understood her well enough to be aware that she was quite capable of employing the maxim for the express purpose of taunting him into demonstrating its fallacy by the devotion of himself to a more practical existence. His own idea on this subject was that though the possession of such a character would dispose a man generally to prefer the consideration of large principles to that of small details, yet, when once any subject came before him worthy to occupy his whole attention, he, the dreamer and theorist, would really be found to be the most practical of men. He was not without a misgiving lest he had undertaken a task for which he was unfit. But having reflected that at least he should be honest, industrious, and single-minded in the conduct of it, and that no man could combine all possible perfections, and having moreover the aid of ample notes of his uncle's instructions, he had resolved not to shrink from the undertaking.

The months passed rapidly with Noel as he, now, devoted himself to the conduct of business in the capital of the great gold State; now, made expeditions to the interior with a view to enlarging and consolidating the commercial relations of his house, inspecting the proposals or condition of the large mining associations, whose operations could only be carried on by the employment of a considerable capital; now taking a voyage to the Sandwich Islands and the various business centres along the coast—during all of which he never failed to gratify his love of the picturesque, while carefully attending to the solider interests at stake. Thus, he did not lose the opportunity of ascending Kileaua, the vast volcanic mountain of Hawaii, at once the menace and the safety-valve of those regions, a longing to visit which

had in his early youth been excited by the charming narratives of the American writer, Cheever. He had visited also the wondrous valley of the Yosemité, with its domed peaks: and the vale of the Big Trees, which, sheltered from wind, and nourished by perpetual mildness and moisture, had kept their life green and fresh for a thousand years, until cut down and carried piecemeal away to fill the Old World with astonishment at the exuberant exaggerations of the New. He had sailed northward to the wild territory of the Hudson's Bay Company on Vancouver and the Columbia, where, amid the dense forests of pines, he learnt to wonder by what law of their being it was, that the trees which farther south grew like columns planted in the earth, without bulge or curve, there extended their bases into huge umbrella-shaped cones, before shooting upwards their mast-like spires.

A taste also of dangerous adventure fell occasionally to his lot, helping to prove his nerve and resource in emergencies: as once, when, with a single companion, a trader from the neighbouring settlement, he went out to shoot wild-fowl in the swamps of the Sacramento.

Taking a light cart to carry their provisions, blankets, and fuel, with the intention of passing the night on some dry spot which might lie a few inches higher than the rest of the vast lagoon, in order to take advantage of the evening and morning flights of the water-fowl, they had penetrated far in among the pools and reeds. The scene was a novel one to Noel, and vividly suggested to him the character that the world must inevitably have had, had it been a universal dead level, without hill and hollow to divide the land from the water.

For many a mile around, nought was to be seen but a wilderness of rushes, pools and rivulets of water, and narrow streaks of spongy ground, just firm enough to support them, between. Half the year a sea, and half the year a swamp, from the midst of which no horizon is visible save one consisting of the waving tops of the rank rushes, through which moist breezes ever sigh and whistle,—the region overlooked by the rugged and fantastic *Buties* of the upper valley of the Sacramento is unsurpassed in dreariness by any in the world. Here is the home of millions of wild fowl of every species, from the smallest of the Anatidæ to the majestic swan. But Noel's love even of sport was inferior to the delight with which, as evening fell, he watched the long streams of birds winging

their noisy way to their home for the night, now forming in close order, now extending into straight lines, or curves, and now again cleaving the air in sharp wedge-like angles, until at last they settle down in the pools around, with a cluck as of satisfaction at regaining their quarters once more.

Dawn had hardly revealed itself when the fowl were astir. As the report of the first shots rolled over the swamp, a deep surging sound arose and swelled around, until it resembled the noise of a heavy sea beating against a rocky cliff. This was the sound made by the flapping of innumerable wings, as the water-fowl simultaneously rose on their first flight. And presently they passed in shoals so close and thick over the heads of the sportsmen that for some minutes the loading and firing were incessant.

The flight over, the prey was collected and placed in a heap, one bird, which was so fat as to have burst open in its fall, being selected for breakfast. This was enveloped in a thick coating of clay, and buried in the embers of their fire. When judged to be properly done, the envelope was cracked, and the fowl, cooked in its own savoury juices, taken out. Noel thought it more delicious than anything he had ever eaten in his life, and admired immensely the clean way in which, by the adherence of the skin and feathers to the clay, the meat was left ready for immediate consumption.

As the sun rose high, all became still. Not a bird was to be found, and Noel and his friend were thinking of making for home, when voices were heard at but a short distance from them. Astonished beyond measure at the presence of others in that desolate region, and that particular spot of it, Noel's companion mounted on the cart, in which their game was already deposited, in order to catch a glimpse of the intruders.

'They are Indians! who must have come down from the Buttes. Help me to load all the pieces with swan-shot at once,' said the trader, jumping down and getting the arms ready as fast as possible.

'What do you suppose they want?' asked Noel.

'Want? Everything. Wait till I speak to them;' and hailing them from the bench of the cart, he told them in their own language to be gone.

A yell of delight from the band told the beleaguered sportsmen that they were indeed the objects for which the savages were searching.

'A precious fix this!' said the trader, as he busied himself in harnessing the horse, and putting it to the cart; 'but I'll circumvent the savages yet. Do you get up and knock over any that come within a too familiar distance.'

Jumping into the cart with alacrity, and ranging the guns so as to be all ready to his hand, Noel asked his companion if he really thought they meant mischief.

'Not if they can get what they want without. But I never trust an Indian farther than I can swing a bull by the tail with my hands greased. I wish we had some more logs with us.'

'What for?' inquired Noel.

'Why, to cook food in case they keep us here for a day or two. By that time I reckon my people would be getting scared, and be thinking of coming out to look for us.'

During this colloquy the Indians had halted about seventy yards off, and were talking together. They were about a dozen in number, and occupied a position nearly between the two hunters and the settlement.

'I don't like to assume that they mean us any harm,' said Noel. 'Suppose we drive straight up to them, and make friends by giving them some of the fowl.'

'Not a darned duck shall they get, if I know it; besides, it's the guns they want,' returned his companion, whom a long residence in the country had made an adept in the ways of the redskins. 'Besides, if we get close we shall have the whole lot of them on us at once, before we can get a shot. No, no, they must be made to keep their distance.'

'It will never do, then, to wait here till it is dark. They will creep noiselessly upon us, and——'

'If we could only light up a good fire when it gets dark,' interrupted the trader, 'and hide ourselves near in the reeds, we could pick them off when they come near the horse and cart.'

'Or if,' said Noel, 'we can make them think we are going to camp here all night, we can crawl away and get home by going round them.'

'And leave the traps and the guns?' said his companion sorrowfully, as the probability of being forced to make such a sacrifice in order to save themselves broke upon him. 'I tell you what we will do first, just try their temper. Here, we'll each take a double gun and drive towards them, waving them off, and if they don't get out of the way, we'll shoot.'

'Very good,' said Noel, and they proceeded to take up a threatening position in their moveable fortress, the cart.

Their advance was met by another yell accompanied by menacing demonstrations, and a flight of arrows. The trader fired, and slightly wounded two of them; whereupon the Indians immediately fell back.

'They won't attack us by daylight,' said he, 'or they'd have done it now while their blood is up. But it won't do for us to go any farther in this direction, or the cart will be swamped.'

'Is there anything too deep for us to wade through between this and the settlement?' asked Noel.

'No, but it's impossible to see which way to go on foot, and we should go travelling round and round without getting a hundred rods from the spot if we tried it.'

'I think that difficulty can be got over,' returned Noel. 'Pray which way by the compass does the town lie?'

'Due south. But what's the use of a compass in the dark?'

'Do you think that if we camp here to-night they will attack us early or late?'

'If we had a fire they would wait till it was burnt low, and then creep up thinking we were both asleep.'

'And if we stay till it is dark without a fire?'

'They will be upon us as soon as it is dark. For they know we can't see their dusky hides at night. I believe that's what Providence gave them that colour for. It's a protection to them.'

'Well, then,' said Noel, cheerfully, 'it's all easy enough. We'll give them the slip as soon as it grows dark, and I will steer you straight home.' And he communicated his plan to his companion, who agreed to it, though with some reluctance, as it involved the loss of the cart.

In pursuance of Noel's scheme they first took from their post of elevation careful observations of the positions both of the settlement and of the Indians. Then they made as if they intended to pass the night there, by rearing a blanket tent-wise, with one of the cart-shafts for pole. Then the horse was led to a spot a little way off to the right, and there picketed out, the Indians and the town being somewhat to their left. The game was then tied together and placed near the horse, ready for slinging on its back. All these movements were invisible to the Indians, who could see only the tent. It remained only to make a good fire as evening fell, and this was to be done by

breaking up the cart, and piling up the pieces so as to make a blaze which would be an index to the position, and deepen the gloom of the surrounding swamp. For it was calculated that the savages would not begin to follow them until they had gained such a start as to make pursuit hopeless. Noel did not doubt of finding his way by the stars, and all that was wanted to ensure the success of his scheme was a certainty of regaining the horse, and making with it such a detour as to pass round the lurking foe unperceived.

'Suppose it turns cloudy? asked the trader; 'and no stars are to be seen?'

Noel thought that some would be visible in almost any case. At any rate, so long as they kept the glow of the fire behind them after once getting a start, they would be going right.

'We'll risk it anyhow. But, halloo, it's raining already! What do you think of the chance now? If it comes on heavy we shall have neither stars nor fire. And if it lasts—— Why, what do those red rascals mean now? Look!'

During this conversation they were mounted on the cart, and they could now see the whole of the savage band making straight for the Buttes as fast as they could go; the wounded ones limping vigorously along as if pressed by some dreaded enemy.

While they were thus watching with perplexity the sudden retreat of their foes, the rain increased, and a sharp flash of lightning revealed a heavy thunder-storm, a rare phenomenon in that region, going on in the neighbouring ranges of the Sierra.

'I have it!' shouted the trader. 'We must look alive. Do you put everything in the cart while I fetch up the horse; or we may have to swim for it yet.'

In a very few moments they were urging their horse homewards through the swamp as fast as he could go, while the rain came down apace, and the dry patches became fewer and smaller, and the point at which they aimed was invisible; and it was only by watching their wake through the reeds that they could keep a tolerably straight course. One remark of the trader's showed the nature and extent of their danger.

'Tisn't the rain that falls here that I'm afraid of, but the flood that will soon be down from the hills. Those cunning redskins saw it coming before I did; and it's that that made them make tracks so quick. We shall be out of danger in another hour. Precious lucky shower for us. *It has saved the cart!*'

CHAPTER III.

And so, attending to business, and not neglecting pleasure or reflection, Noel lived the ideal life of the civilised wanderer of modern times, not always, perhaps, heart- or fancy-free;—he was too susceptible for that;—but keenly enjoying both the friendly affection that ever followed him from home and manifested its solicitude in welcomest letters, and the warmer feelings which might occasionally be evoked by those with whom he came in contact.

And so passed nearly three years. Three years, and he still clung to the scenes of his most recent experiences, as all do cling who have once inhaled, for any time, the exquisite charms of the climate of those Californian coasts. In what the charm consists, it may be hard to say. Devoted to the analysis of his sensations as Noel was, even he did not detect any one ingredient so dominant as to venture to pronounce it the key to the mystery. 'Perhaps,' he wrote to his uncle, by way of excusing himself for lingering so long abroad, 'it is the combination of many specialities. The climate is truly marvellous. In the air, I feel myself inhaling the finest champagne. Its very breath exhilarates me. Never did I see stars shine out as they do here. Nowhere have I found such open-handed fellowship between man and man. It seems as if in this newest portion of the New World people have gone so fast and so far as to have left behind them the narrowness and uncharities of the Old. And this, not in religion merely; for even the politics of the country have none of the intensity that characterises the other side of the Continent. Above all things, labour is respectable. Men of family and high culture toil at manual occupation during the day, and in the evening meet on equal terms the wealthy lawyer and merchant. An idle man here would actually be considered as wasting his time! What really operates to keep people apart, is not difference of means, but difference of mental habit. It is true that no man in such a state of society is sure of his wealth, but then *no one is sure of his poverty*, which I take to be a very effective counterbalance to any disadvantage on the previous score.

'In fact, the condition of things is very much one that I have been laughed at by you for imagining possible in this world. There is no monopoly of brain-work by one class and

physical labour by another. The gentleman often works, and the labourer often thinks; and the result is, that the, to me, odious arrogance and servility of the older communities is replaced by a frank and mutual civility. The feeling of the artisan to his employer is, "You've got the dollars, and I've got the skill: and I guess my skill is of more account to you than your dollars are to me." And the feeling of the employer to the labourer is, "My fortune is *in esse*, and yours *in posse;* and goodness alone knows how soon we may change places."

'I like being on such equal terms with those with whom I have to deal, for I am so constituted as to almost equally dislike the notion of commanding or being commanded. I can, however, quite understand there being people who claim absolute deference on the strength of their position or wealth as their rightful due. But such persons had better stay at home. They would get nothing done for them here, where it is not the fashion to *obey orders*. Luckily I had no difficulty in falling into the ways of the country in this respect; but then I never gave an *order* in my life, (or, indeed, obeyed one,) yet I have generally got my own way. Whether my principle be a right or a wrong one, it has certainly answered out here.

'I little dreamt of remaining away from you for three years, and am getting somewhat home-sick. Whenever you *decidedly encourage* me to come back, (my equivalent for "order,") be sure that I shall be only too glad to occupy my old quarters, and spend the evenings in chats with my dear old uncle. I shall have plenty to tell you. I get an occasional bulletin from Sophia Bevan about you, and shall expect to find you not a bit altered.

'I had another letter from James Maynard lately. He tells me, shortly, that the mine continues to be as successful as ever, though the difficulty of transporting the silver to the coast increases with the growing anarchy of the country. He says that if I could only take down a band of Californian Filibusters and annex Mexico quietly to the United States, I should be doing a vast service to all parties. Some rumours have reached us here of a proposed intervention by European powers. You may rest assured that the United States will permit no one to touch Mexico for good or ill but themselves. They consider it bound to be theirs, and are only waiting until, ripe and rotten, it falls into their hands.'

About the same time Noel received the following letter from Sophia Bevan.

'Linnwood.

'DEAREST BOY,

'I am so glad you are having such a pleasant time in those wild regions, and am so grateful for your nice long letters. Mine must seem very stupid to you among the excitements of volcanoes, and forests, and aborigines, and the more substantial delights of work. I congratulate you from my heart on having gone and proved that you can be practical when you please, and shall allow you henceforth to indulge in dreaming at pleasure without applying my goad. I only wish that I had a chance of being practical, too. But, alas! we spinsters were not foreseen and provided for at the creation. Eve was not brought into the world until a man had been provided for her; and if it is not good for a man to be alone, I am sure it is worse for a woman. You bachelors certainly have the best of it; for you have no call to be so *good* as we poor women are forced to be. And I am sure that being always good is a very bad thing for health—of mind, if not of body. It does not do to be living always on beef and potatoes, and I believe that mental or emotional variety is just as necessary to us as variety in diet. Besides, it's not fair. Our sin, when we commit any, finds us out; while yours doesn't you. Excuse the great blot I have just made. It's mamma's fault, and this is how. I went over to have a look at your snuggery yesterday, so that I might be able to assure you it has not been burnt down or blown away at latest advices, as you business men say; and on peeping into your studio, I saw, standing sad and solitary in the centre on its pedestal, with a cloth over its head, your latest achievement —Undine, or Psyche. Lifting her drapery, I found that spiders (ugh!) had established themselves in the eyes and ears of your pet. So I took pity on her, and brought her home; and having had her washed, placed her in the drawing-room, with a little side-table for pedestal. I had forgotten that mamma was in the room, and I was startled by hearing her exclaim, 'Extraordinary!' Conscience-stricken, I suppose, I fancied she applied it to what I had just written, which certainly is a little out of her line. But no; she was inspecting your Psyche, and only cried out on seeing its marvellous likeness to Margaret.

'Edmund, it is her very self. Are you quite sure that you were not tricking us all, and slily going over to Porlock Cove, when we thought you did not even know of her existence? No, I am sure you were not, and the resemblance is only accidental,

because—no, I shall not give my reasons. But isn't it curious? and that mamma should have made the discovery first! Do you know, I am not quite happy about the Maynards. I scarcely know why; but to me there is a *shadow* in the letters of them both. The very endeavour to write cheerfully betrays itself to me as an effort. Yet I am sure they ought to be happy enough, he living with her on such a Tommy Tiddler's ground, getting rich so fast with the gold and silver he is picking up—(of course you know he is a partner in the property. Your dear good uncle has behaved so handsomely to him; and says that he owes some amends for having helped him to kill his father! It appears that Mr Tresham *was the Company*, having taken James's advice and got rid of everybody else)—and she, with him and her two darling babes, which all the natives round treat as little angels for their divine and un-Mexican fairness.

'I don't think it can be want of society, for Margaret never had any, and James never cared for it. No; it is the very fact of their not complaining of anything that makes me think there is some source of bitterness that lies too deep for utterance. Nobody's life, even in a silver mine, can be so very, very perfectly happy as to be without one little disagreeability, and in the absence of much to write about, it is sure to pop out unless intentionally kept back. Now I should be much relieved at seeing the bitter drop, that rises in the fountain of their life, bubble up and flow away, (*not* as in the Latin ode you taught me to translate,) and so be got rid of. I am sure that if I didn't encourage things to come to the surface with me, I should be full of disagreeables inside. What I think is, that James is a fidgety man; and perhaps he is a little morbid about the memory of his father, and his own peculiar position; and Margaret, instead of laughing at his fancies, or scolding them away as *I* should do, treats them as serious affairs, and by cosseting him encourages them to grow bigger.

'I do so wish they would make haste and get all the money they want and come away, and leave some one else of common kind to do such work. I am quite sure that the rough New World is no place for the sensitive organisations of the Old. As well harness Pegasus to a plough, as set James Maynard to delve for silver. It is true, he is a scientific man, but he is wasted upon the mere *application* of science. I do so wonder whether anything will take you to have a look at them before

you come back. I doubt its being a kindness to go; they would so miss you afterwards.

'That reminds me. I have made another conquest and another joke, (which I don't mind telling *you*,) and the joke has lost me my conquest. It was a parson again—such lots of parsons as I have had in love with me! I think it must be that they give me credit for a double amount of original sin, and that makes them doubly anxious to convert me. But it's only fair to admit that I fell in love with him first; and how, do you think? Why, from hearing him preach! Such a wonderful little man, and all brains. I really thought he must have overheard some of the talks we used to have together. Instead of giving out his text in the usual formal way, he mounted on the stool which he is obliged to stand upon to see over the pulpit cushion, and looked round him, as if taking our measure to see what we could bear; and then said in a slow sarcastic manner,—

'"It used to be said that God made man in his own image. I hope this morning to convince you that nothing of the kind can be said now; for that men have returned the compliment and made God in theirs."

'And then he went on to show that each nation's God is its idealisation of Humanity. That the Egyptians idealised certain animal forces which were more powerful in some brutes than in man; and venerated, in particular, the crocodile because, having no tongue (?), it represents God, who does all things by his will, and has no need to speak. That the Greeks went in for the intelligent and sensuous in their gods. The Romans for conquest and law. And he repeated some such suggestive lines, which I can only misquote, hoping you can tell me where they come from, for I forgot to ask him before we left town.

"The Ethiop's gods have dusky cheeks,
Thick lips, and woolly hair.
The Grecian gods are like the Greeks,
As bright-eyed, calm, and fair."

Then he used the rather Pantheistic words, 'God's pulses throb through all nature, and all humanity.' He was rather confused when he tried to explain the self-sacrifice doctrine; but he pleased *me* by launching into the regular humanitarian theory that the world is sustained by the sacrifice of the good people to the bad: that society is like a hull full of leakages which we good ones (?) are eternally (it seems to me hopelessly) stop-

ping up: that sympathy is the lever of man's elevation: and that only by suffering for and with men could God express this sympathy! He spoke of Christ as a worker *par excellence*, and said that purity of life means not a destruction of the desires and senses, but a balancing of them with our intellectual and emotional part.

'Of course he couldn't argue very closely in a pulpit, but he was as broad as he could be to keep a Christian congregation. For my own very practical self, I always feel terribly the void occasioned by the *singleness* of Christ's life. It is the grand defect of the system as an engine of social regeneration. I ventured to say something of this to him some time after I had made his acquaintance, (for he often came to hear me sing,) and he said that the two moral natures of man and of woman seemed to be so united in Christ as to make such an experience unnecessary and superfluous, if not impossible. Of course I returned to this, that if so different from the rest of humanity, he could be but an imperfect example to us as to how we should act under our own circumstances. But he would not allow this, and was a good deal scandalised by my exploding at a joke which we made between us, and for my share in which I really take some credit. He was saying that much of the popular orthodoxy rests upon a misconception.

'I said—but no, I really can't tell you what I said. But it nearly made me choke with laughter. He looked very grave for a moment, and then he saw it too, and seizing his hat he hurried away, first casting a reproachful look at me, and then cramming his handkerchief into his mouth. He never called afterwards, and I could not trust myself to go to his chapel again before we left town.'

Noel's movements were at length determined by this letter from Mr Tresham.

'My dear Edmund,

'I am sorry to say or suggest anything that may delay your return. I have no doubt, however, that you will fall in with my views. I want you to pay Mr Maynard a visit on your way. His position is a very anxious one, and his recent letters lead me to fear that his mind is being affected thereby. Look into everything in Mexico, and report to me fully on the state of the country. A movement is on foot with reference to it, and

your information, obtained, as I hope you will take care that it shall be, not only from Mr Maynard, but from independent sources in the capital, will be of the greatest service in determining me whether to promote or discourage it. Mexican affairs have reached such a pass that if the government of the United States does not interfere, ours must. See if there is any strong party for annexation to the States. That would be the real policy to favour. Any other plan would make almost as much mischief as it would cure. Find out before leaving San Francisco whether such a party would be sure of receiving substantial aid from thence, in the event of a move. The steamer will drop you at Acapulco, whence you will easily reach Mexico city. If you have much baggage, it may be well to send it across to await you at Vera Cruz, while you go in light marching order to the capital and Guanaxuato. You will have no difficulty in finding your way to the Real de Dolóres. I flatter myself it is pretty well known by this time. The rascally brigands always lie in wait in swarms on the track of our convoys, so that Maynard has to keep up quite an army for their protection to the coast, at great expense and trouble. Matters are moving very fast, and it is not improbable that some important step will be taken before you get there. French, English, and Spanish bondholders are alike urging their governments to action; and I am positive we shall make a mess of it if we combine with the others. I should think the Bank at San Francisco must be working steadily enough in its furrow by this time to do without you.'

CHAPTER IV.

A TEDIOUS ride approached its close. The track was that which led from the mountain town of Guanaxuato to 'el Real de Dolóres,' as the mining property to which Edmund Noel was bound was called. He was sitting somewhat weary and listless upon his horse in advance of his escort, who were chattering together some distance behind him. The path was very narrow. It lay along a sharp mountain-ridge, by which he had ascended from the region of the cactus and the maize, through a belt of

cedars and oaks, to forests thick with pines. The day was very bright and very hot. The greater part of his road recently had lain over a barren treeless plateau; and unaccustomed as he was to the latitude, the shade and coolness of the forest that was now thickening around him were intensely grateful to him.

Mounting the ascent at a foot's pace, Noel left the care of selecting the way to his steed, and occupied himself in thinking of his journey's end and its probable proximity. Presently, in the densest part of the forest, the path divided into two, and the animal paused for an indication from his rider as to which he should take. Suddenly there was a tinkling of bells, and a sound of footsteps before him; and, looking forwards, Noel beheld a magnificent mule, adorned with the fantastic trappings of the country, picking its way daintily down the stony track. A veiled figure was upon its back; seeing which he removed his *sombrero*,—(he had adopted the prevalent picturesque jaunty riding dress,)—and, throwing back his clustering brown curls from his brow, he waited, hat in hand, for an answer to his question as to which path led to the Dolóres mine.

He spoke in Spanish, to the best of his ability. The lady stopped directly in front of him, and replied in English. In so doing she lifted her veil, and revealed her face; when straightway the dim depths of the dark forest were, for him at least, illumined as by a sudden ray of sunshine, so wondrously fair was the vision that broke upon him. He felt that only at that moment he learnt what beauty meant, and why he lived.

She spoke, and the voice corresponded with the face. In neither was there the radiancy of buoyant careless happiness, but the tones were tones of thoughtfulness, and the expression that of habitual sadness.

'Your left, Señor, leads to the dwelling of the *Directór*: your right, to the *Hacienda de beneficios*. I am going thither.'

'Mrs Maynard, if I am not mistaken?' said Noel, in an inquiring tone; to which she somewhat timidly replied—

'Mr Noel, I presume. This letter has just come from you, probably to announce your arrival. I am taking it to my husband.'

'It ought to have been here some days ago,' said Noel; 'I fear I shall take you by surprise.'

'Oh no,' she answered, in an absent tone. 'I—we—have long expected you.' Then, as if recollecting herself, she added aloud, for the escort had now come up, and were gathered behind him gazing at her,—

'Pray ride on to the house. Mr Maynard and myself will be there as soon as you can, by another road.'

So saying, she veiled the glory of her face, and with a gentle obeisance passed to go her way.

'Santa Madre de Dios!' exclaimed the foremost of the band, crossing themselves devoutly; while Noel remained immovable, as if unable to see his way in the sudden night that had fallen upon him with the withdrawal of her countenance.

His horse, however, stimulated by the others pressing on its rear, continued its way: but Noel remained sunk in a deeper reverie than he had ever known. Then came into his mind these lines of Browning's,—

> 'He looked at her as a lover can;
> She looked at him as one who awakes,—
> The past was a sleep, and her life began.'

Presently he murmured,—

'A Psyche, a Psyche; with James Maynard for Eros! Has the soul come yet? or does it still linger, waiting to be awakened?'

He dared not follow the train of thought; and not long afterwards an exclamation from his men called his attention to a house standing a little in advance of the party, and two mules advancing with rapid strides up a steep acclivity towards it from the opposite direction. On them were Maynard and Margaret, hastening to reach the house first by a short cut from the *hacienda*.

CHAPTER V.

Noel was received by his friend with the greatest cordiality. Independently of the associations and pursuits which they had in common, it was no small luxury to Maynard to escape from his monotonous intercourse with the mining officials to the conversation of a friend and equal.

The escort, recruited, paid, and dismissed, had taken its departure, and the friends passed the rest of the day in almost unintermitting conversation. At first they reclined in the broad verandah by which the house was surrounded on three sides, and whence the view in every direction was magnificent. The rear

was devoted to the stables and *corral.* Maynard had selected for his private residence the most picturesque, and almost the most inaccessible, spot in the whole neighbourhood. In his eagerness to surround his bride with all attainable beauty, he had fixed their abode in an open spot on the summit of the mountain, on the lower portion of which the works were situated. It was evident that such site must be liable to inconvenience, especially on the score of the absence of any water supply. But Maynard was assured by his architect that such an objection did not merit consideration in a country where no one dreamt of walking or driving, and everything was packed on mules.

The view was indeed a fine one, consisting of mountains and gorges alternating in endless succession, though with bare and sterile sides; the great silver-producing ranges of Guanaxuato being devoid of all vegetation, save only in the spot where Maynard's lot had fallen. As they looked towards the north-east, the smoke of the works could be discerned far below, rising from among the pines. And now and then the din of the machinery and cries of the *muléros* reached the ears of the sitters in the verandah.

Sunset lit up the whole scene with a softness of tone that mitigated the desolateness of its grandeur; and then the party abandoned a position which at that elevation becomes disagreeably and dangerously chilly in the evening, and spent the hours remaining until bedtime within doors.

Margaret and Edmund said little to each other, yet each felt as if there was a perfect understanding between them. Her children, to Maynard's surprise, took to the stranger at once, and played with him as readily as with their mother. They were literally little saints in the divine transparent innocence of their appearance, having all their mother's refined sweetness and spirituality, and even, in some slight degree, her subdued and thoughtful air.

The conversation that followed their evening meal and the removal of the children, attracted Margaret's attention and excited her interest to an extent which puzzled Noel. It turned upon his visit by the way to the capital, and the opinion he had been led to form about the impending intervention and its probable consequences. He fancied that Maynard evinced an anxiety on the matter for reasons even more closely personal than any affecting his mining enterprise. It also struck him

as curious that the husband and wife rarely addressed each other, but directed their remarks to him. It seemed to him as if some foregone conclusion had been come to by Maynard, which Margaret deprecated, but owned her inability to withstand, and to counteract which she trusted to circumstances.

One of the questions thus mooted was that of the safety of foreigners in the event of a hostile invasion by the European powers; for this was clearly the point to which public affairs were tending. It was generally believed that a joint expedition was even now approaching the shores of Mexico. And if the government, such as it was, determined to concentrate all its forces against the enemy, (for as such the Mexicans persisted in regarding the expected arrivals,) not only would it be impossible to transmit treasure to the coast for shipment, but who was to guarantee security to the dwellers on the lonely mountains?

It was late in the evening when Maynard left the room to receive in his office, from one of his *administradors*, the day's report of work done. His absence enabled Noel and Margaret to exchange the first free words since their meeting on the mountain path. Curiously enough, although each had longed to talk to the other, yet, when the opportunity came, neither seemed ready to take advantage of it. Margaret turned over some work that she held in her hand, and Noel took up a book from the table.

'Pray,' said he, at length, 'what did you mean to-day by saying that you had long expected me?'

Margaret felt a relief at his thus breaking the silence, and also at his not addressing her with the formal 'Mrs Maynard,' though she had no idea that she derived satisfaction from that slight circumstance. Neither had she any idea what reply to make to the question. She would have expressed astonishment at his recollection of her remark, but that every minute circumstance of their meeting was deeply engraved upon her own memory. So she said, forcing a slight smile,—

'I cannot tell. Ask me something else.'

'When I remember,' he said, 'how intimately connected our respective friends and relations have long been, it seems very wonderful that we should not have met long ago in England, instead of waiting until I had to seek you out on this remote pinnacle.'

'Is not everything wonderful?' asked Margaret, in a slightly

impatient tone, and added,—'yes, you are right. Though now I see you I find it difficult not to fancy that I have known you always.'

'From hearing me mentioned by the Bevans, and James?' he suggested: but she only shook her head.

'If either of us knows the other by report,' he continued, 'I can certainly claim to know you best; for I must have heard you spoken of far oftener than you can possibly have heard of me. Why,' he went on, with a growing animation that began to communicate itself to her, 'I even ventured to ransack your nest at Porlock Cove while it was yet warm with your presence, and saw your drawings, and talked with your nurse about your convent life—or death, rather. And then, Sophia Bevan's letters are always at least half about you. How she would enjoy being here, chatting with us now! Poor dear Sophy! I hope you learnt to appreciate her thoroughness?'

'Oh yes, I have indeed. At first I did not understand her. I had seen so few people, and she was so clever, that I think I was frightened. Things seemed to come to her without her having to think for them. I thought then, by the way you were generally spoken of, that—that you would not have remained away from her all these years.'

She said this with an arch smile, and an air that showed that she was now instinctively aware that Edmund had no tender feeling on the subject which she could wound by a blunt reference to it.

'You understand our friendship better now, then?' he asked.

'I understand that being what I understood you to be, you had not those feelings for Miss —— for my cousin, which I could not understand your having, unless you were very different from what I had come to imagine.'

'You mean that report in some way belied me to you?'

'Only in making you out to be engaged to Sophia. It was because report made you what you are that I—I hardly thought you suited to each other.'

'I see. Then I correspond to the *eidólon*, (which, as James will tell you, means, not idol, but image or likeness,) which report had drawn of me for you.'

'I do not think I learnt you from reports,' she returned; 'they came afterwards. I suppose I am very foolish and fanciful; but the idea always haunted me that somewhere in the

world I had a brother, who was ever near, but yet failed to become visible to me. I even fancied what he was like, and felt certain that I should recognise him whenever I might see him. And sometimes it seemed to me, from what I heard at Linnwood, as if you must be something like him. Even Sophia laughed at me once for taking your part when she was scolding you in your absence; and I said I was not thinking of you at all, but of my imaginary brother, whom it seemed to me that she was finding fault with for something that I did not dislike in him.'

'And you never saw him?' said Noel, in so gentle and kindly a tone, as not to startle her into self-consciousness by a strange voice, 'until——?'

Raising her head so as to throw back the masses of auburn hair, which fell forward on her work, and looking him full in the face, she replied,—

'I never saw anybody like him until to-day.'

Noel did not immediately make any reply. It seemed to him that a veil had been removed from his eyes. He recalled his first distant glimpse of Porlock Cove, and the fair tenant of its limpid waters; and the lineaments which, drawing solely upon his imagination, he had given to his Psyche. He thought of the obscure suggestions contained in Sophia Bevan's letters, and of Lord Littmass's strange proposal, and Sophia's comments thereon. These memories ran rapidly through his mind, blending themselves as they came with the revelation that Margaret had just made to him of her own interior life, a revelation which he now thought he understood far better than she did. He saw that Margaret and himself were indeed one and identical in temperament, in character, in soul; the other half of each other, long dreamt of, and yearned for; and now at length found—found when too late. He shuddered as his mind reached the thought; and as he shuddered he heard at the door the quick step of James Maynard.

Maynard entered the room, saying in loud cheerful voice,—

'Now, Margaret, you must be thinking of bed. Our traveller must be tired.'

He had been absent only some fifteen or twenty minutes, but to both Margaret and Edmund it seemed that an eternity had unveiled itself in the interval. She rose, saying,—

'Then I will at once say *buenas noches*,' and placing her hand frankly in that of Noel, added, 'you will find a choice of

sleeping places in your room. But I do not think that the usual Mexican pests will trouble you in this house, so that you need not use the hammock unless you prefer it.'

And running up to her own room she threw herself down on her knees, and poured out her soul in thanksgiving for having had her brother sent to her at last.

Maynard and Noel talked yet some time longer, and when at length Edmund went into the room prepared for him, he started to see the familiar air of comfort and home that it possessed, notwithstanding the foreign elements which entered into its composition. James looked keenly round it, and said in a tone of half-surly sprightliness,—

'Ah, I see you have made friends with Margaret already,'—a speech that ought to have been quite unintelligible to Noel, but was not. Looking round after James had left him, he found on the table some books, which, to judge by the lightly pencilled marks, must have been her special favourites; and on the walls were hung some of her own drawings, one of which was a water-colour sketch of Porlock Cove with its sandy beach and enclosing cliffs, and a white figure dimly apparent through superincumbent waters. And the legend beneath was that of Sabrina:—

'Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave.'

It suggested to Noel, Margaret herself dwelling in a dream, and unconscious of the meaning of the world by which she was surrounded; or one in whom the current of being ran deep, like a stream at the bottom of a cleft mountain, unreached by light from the day above.

CHAPTER VI.

His sleep in the bracing air of those wild uplands was light and refreshing to Noel after his experience of the hot and reeking lower country. From the window of his bedroom he saw the sun rise red and clear, and inhaled the cool fresh air that it seemed to breathe over the world's expanse. Already the sounds arose from the workers in the valley below, and even within the house every one was awake and stirring. The morning and the evening were the real times for living and enjoying life under

a sun that ever glowed too fiercely at midday. Maynard's house was itself unshaded by trees, but its exposure to the direct action of the sun was compensated by the free access of the currents of air which circulated round it. All the paths which radiated from it were shrouded in deep shade, and none passing to and from the house could be seen until they emerged into the little clearing immediately around it.

It was thus, nestled among pines, and overlooking a wilderness of mountain peaks and ridges, that Margaret had dwelt since her arrival on the scene of her husband's occupation; and it appeared to Noel that if either of them ought to be depressed by the changeless solitude of the locality, it was far less likely to be Maynard, to whom his home was a pleasant relief from the daily bustle and toil of the mines, than to Margaret, who had no such variation of scene and engrossment. Their visitors were very few, and consisted almost exclusively of superintendents of other mines, who, hearing of the success of Maynard's method of working, came to seek information from him. Some of these were men of education and good standing; and all, whether French, English, Spanish, or American, had manifested the liveliest admiration for Margaret, and had carried her fame far and wide under a name which accorded alike with the genius of the country, and the habitual thoughtfulness of her countenance. It was quite as much owing to this latter cause as to Maynard's being manager of the Dolóres mine, that Margaret was generally spoken of as 'La Señora de los Dolóres.' While their house was being built, she had passed some time with the family of a neighbouring director, and had there amazed and won all hearts by the force of her gentleness and beauty, and the unconscious self-abnegation that pervaded all her actions.

Shortly after they were settled in their new dwelling, James had held a festival in honour of the occasion, at which the governor of the province had been entertained in the house, and the surrounding clearing filled with tents for the numerous guests. Though the occasion was a convivial one, it had a politic purpose and result; for it enabled the various mining managers present to make arrangements with the governor for ensuring the safe conduct of their treasure to the coast.

This grandee, it may be here mentioned, had not fully comprehended the merits of the question, until enlightened on this occasion. He admitted that he had always been under the impression that these foreign proprietors were little else than

robbers of his country, who came and carried off its treasures without giving any compensation in return; wherefore, he did not grudge their bars of silver falling into the hands of the brigands, who not only were good Catholics, but who moreover spent their gains in the country, and that chiefly among the poor.

Maynard, however, managed both to amuse and convince him by his way of representing that the only valuable thing either in Mexico or in the rest of heaven or earth is work, whether mental or physical; and that even the precious metals do not constitute wealth until intelligent labour has been bestowed upon them; so that he might as well call the mere uncultivated soil treasure, as bestow the name upon substances hidden in the earth. Wherefore he ought, on the contrary, to be grateful to those who came from afar to enrich the country with their energy and skill. He added, too, that he would venture to guarantee him a warm welcome in England or in the States if he would only go and develop any source of wealth hitherto neglected there.

Acting on a suggestion previously made by Maynard, the various directors had brought with them curious and valuable specimens of silver, in many of which the virgin metal and its associated substances had assumed fantastic forms and colours. These were exhibited to the governor, and upon his expressing his admiration, they were delicately and spontaneously pressed upon him for acceptance; so that when he returned home it was with a handsome fee in possession, and no misgivings on the score of his having been deliberately bribed to do his duty.

Maynard's address on this occasion, added to his previous repute for high station, scholarship, and ability, won for him an excellent position in the country, and he was regarded by the foreign population as one of their most capable and influential advisers. For the last two years, whatever communication he had held with the world lying beyond his mine was by letter. Neither he nor Margaret had ever left their home, except once when, on the death of the governor, Maynard went to Guanaxuato to pay his respects to his successor.

As Noel gazed from his eyrie over the wilderness towards the radiant morning sky, and thought of the new day that within the last few hours had dawned upon the souls of himself and of her whose heart had at first sight recognised and claimed him as her near and sole of kin, he called to mind her previous history, and the long night of unconsciousness as to the possi-

bilities of her nature in which she had hitherto slumbered; for he understood all this now.

And as the sun rapidly left the edge of the horizon, and rose towards its zenith, he scarcely distinguished in his thoughts between the overpowering heat of the growing day, and the fervent emotions which were rising in his own breast. The first sensations of love were by no means new to Edmund, but they had never before been excited by any who were capable of sustaining and nurturing them into maturity; and he knew that the woman who could attract and fulfil his whole nature had hitherto been hidden in the regions of the undiscovered.

Would the morning light bring repentance to Margaret for her hasty confidence? or reveal her to him as other than the eve had shown her? If ever nature rose to steadfastness in woman's soul, surely in her it shone pre-eminent. Her face, her voice, her manner, her form, her colouring, her very silence, betokened her the perfectest realisation of his loftiest ideal. 'She is too good to let herself love me knowingly,' he thought to himself; 'and how long can she continue in unconsciousness? The awakening must never come, if I can help it. Friend and sister are what James and Margaret must ever be to me.'

She met him when he came down to breakfast, her whole being suffused with calm gladness as for a great mercy received and appreciated. James, too, was cordial, but no one was talkative. After breakfast Noel played awhile with the children, and then Maynard took him off to the works for the rest of the morning, giving him the choice of walking or riding.

Maynard smiled on his choosing the former, and said, as they descended the hill, that it was one of the points on which he had had to combat the prejudices of the country. It had been seriously urged upon him, when he first arrived, that no Mexican who had any self-respect, ever used his own legs when he could use those of a horse or mule, and that his practice of walking might seriously impair his authority with his employés. He had, however, followed his own feelings in the matter, and retained his freedom to walk or ride as he pleased; and he thought that the independence he had exhibited in that and in other matters had impressed his people rather favourably than otherwise.

'I suppose, however,' said Noel, 'that in everything that affects themselves you have to conform to usage?'

'Oh, yes. I rather take a pride in showing them that I

respect them sufficiently to encourage their doing as they please ; but I always impress upon them at the same time that on the same principle they must be careful not to infringe on the liberties of others. You have no conception of the trouble I had at first in preventing quarrels between my Mexicans and the labourers I imported from home. And I am sorry to say that I found the latter rather the worse of the two, for there were some among them who thought it their duty to try and convert the natives to their own way of thinking in religion. It is only by taking them in hand myself, and getting the *padre* to help me with the natives, that I have got them to live without constant quarrelling and fighting.'

'And how do you and the priest get on together?'

'Capitally, for I leave him full liberty to deal with his own people as he likes, and as they are accustomed to. They are for the most part such savages, that I am rather glad to be saved having much to do with them in their mental relations. We have the common ground of our humanity, upon which we meet freely ; and I believe that I have completely won them there by simple kindness and justice.'

'Are they of Indian, or Spanish blood?'

'A few have some Spanish blood, but the vast majority, as of all the Mexican population, are either aboriginal Indians, or mixed with the various conquering races which have come down upon them in succession from the north, and been finally absorbed in their turn. It appears as if the aboriginal race is only to be got rid of by extirpation. To let them live at all is to consent to their future resurrection.'

'And their religion? Have they any?'

'Oh dear yes! plenty. The inhabitants of this country were always an excessively religious people. It was their addiction to human sacrifices, accompanied by certain rites resembling those of Moloch and Ashtoreth, that led Lord Kingsborough to claim a Jewish origin for them.'

'For the aborigines?'

'Rather for their Aztec and other conquerors, whose own legends point to an Asiatic derivation. However, the *padre* claims them all as Catholic now ; and I must allow that they take as kindly to the religion of their Spanish, as they seem to have taken to those of their previous, invaders. It is not easy, however, to ascertain the particulars ; but the pure Indians, who come from the North, get a holiday once a year, and go off to

New Mexico to join their tribes, which are said to maintain the ancient faith and worship of Mexico, and to hold their rites and sacrifices somewhere in secret.'

'Have you been able to ferret out any particulars about them?'

Maynard asked Noel if he remembered their researches at Stonehenge, and the conclusions they had been there led to about the unity of ancient faiths.

'What! and have you discovered similar traces in Mexico?'

'Yes, and not in Mexico only, but I have ascertained that they extend far up among the most savage tribes of North America, and probably across Behring's Straits into Asia. The old cities contain remains which are almost the exact counterpart of those found in India and Egypt; and the amusing part of it is that the most intelligent of my Indians affect to despise the Christians of the country as possessing but a mild and unintelligible corruption of their own ancient faith and worship. We should have known more about their history and origin, but for the ignorant bigots who first came over from Spain, and mistaking the native picture-writings for Idols, destroyed all they could get hold of, fancying they were thereby removing an obstacle to Christianity.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE loud din indicated that they were now close to the works. Entering the gate, for the whole mine was walled in, Maynard conducted his friend, first to his office, where they remained for some time, and then to the various parts of the works which were likely to interest him, describing all the processes, which Noel soon perceived to comprise some which were very different to anything he had seen used in gold-mining. The odd mixture of sounds which had been exciting his curiosity was now explained. On the upper side of the *patío*, or yard, were arranged a series of cylinders, wheels, and stampers, for crushing the ore to powder. These were worked by mules and horses. And immediately below them was a large reservoir into which the powdered ores were washed by water kept always

flowing through the machinery. This reservoir was a morass of dark mud, knee deep, in which horses, mules, and oxen were driven frantically round in never ending rotation. This was done to mix the whole mass thoroughly with quicksilver, in order to amalgamate the particles of metal. The clang and thud of the machinery, combined with the shouts of the drivers, constituted a portion of the noise that daily rose to the summit, and kept the dwellers there ever within hearing of the works. The rest was produced by the revolutions of a number of huge barrels, in which a similar result was obtained from the poorer ores.

'Have you much ore in which the silver is visible?' asked Noel, examining a lump which he had picked out of a vast heap of apparently worthless earth.

'There is a fair proportion of it,' answered Maynard; 'but the principal part of our yield comes from this very stuff in which a microscope could scarcely reveal the presence of the metal. Most of the mines in Mexico have got past the individual stage when men might get rich by their solitary labour. They can now only be made to pay by means of such a vast and complex organisation as you see here. My main results have been attained from materials which used to be treated as refuse. On my first visit I found enormous heaps of this stuff already excavated by the former owners, and having tested it and made an estimate of the cost of putting it through the mills on a cheap system, partly my own invention and partly borrowed, I found that I could make the mine pay well, even if the richest lodes failed altogether. I have been helped, too, a good deal by the cheapening of quicksilver, owing to the discovery of it in quantity in California. But my hopes in respect of this stuff have been more than realised, and in addition to that the richer lodes have by no means failed.'

'So that within three years you have paid off all expenses, and are working at a clear profit! Why, in a few more, you will all be millionaires.'

'If the world last so long in Mexico,' said Maynard somewhat gloomily.

'What do you fear?' asked Noel.

'A rich mine has, somehow, generally been the ruin of its owners in this country, and the present condition of things is quite enough to make one anxious. But happen what may, I

have resolved to stick to the mine even if I have to send Margaret and the children to England.'

'Why, what do you anticipate?'

'Anarchy, revolution, civil war, confiscation, massacre, and every other horrible thing that a tropical climate and a barbarous people can produce in perfection.'

'Then you anticipate no good from intervention?'

'No immediate good, certainly. It is sure to excite some opposition, however managed; and opposition in Mexico always means severe tribulation for many. If I could have kept the value of the mine a secret, it might pass unnoticed; but there are too many who know the number of silver bars we are in the habit of sending down to Tampico for shipment.'

'But you could not send your family away without you. You would at least see them to Tampico; and once there, the sight of the steamer would be sure to modify your resolution. Surely you have some trustworthy agent to take charge in your absence?'

'Not if I go to England. Besides, Margaret is quite reconciled to the separation, and I think it will do the children good.'

This was not the first time that Maynard's tone in referring to Margaret had jarred painfully upon Noel. Utterly ignorant of their real relations, he was yet impressed in the same way that Sophia Bevan had owned herself to be impressed, by an instinctive perception of a lack of sympathy between them, and of their own consciousness both of their unhappiness and of its source.

It was curious to Noel to note that throughout all that Maynard said there ran an undercurrent of character which reminded him of Sophia Bevan. He thought he detected the same persistent tendency to analyse personal relations that used to irritate him with her, as indicating a belief in the power of the will to govern the emotions. Without in any degree underestimating the value of discipline in developing and controlling the mind and the expression, Noel was unable to admit the possibility of its modifying or reversing the feelings. In many a battle-royal had he contended with Sophia on behalf of the divine right of spontaneity as against will, of inspiration as against mechanism. He applied the theory alike to the affections and to Art. Her assertion that any man or woman could love each other, or at least behave as if they did, by dint of try-

ing to do so, he treated with incredulous scoffings; and in the protraction of her own singlehood in spite of the strong domestic tendencies with which she was endowed, he sought the explanation of her holding such a tenet. That she had such tendencies he had no doubt, and she did not scruple to own it boldly, even to shocking a somewhat prim interlocutor who, in a theological discussion, once charged her with being a Pantheist.

'Not a bit of it,' cried Sophia, with a shriek of laughter. 'If I am anything at all, I'm a *Man*theist!'

But however Edmund Noel and Sophia Bevan might vary in their characters and theories, they were agreed in their practical estimate of results in the case of the Maynards. The fact was that, failing to find the perfect accord of sentiment that he desired in his married life, James had early set his powerful intellect to analyse the sources of their disquietude, for the dissatisfaction was mutual. Margaret hoped by earnest and patient striving to mould herself to her husband's wishes; hoped against hope, inasmuch as she felt convinced of the invincible discordancy of their natures. But his temperament made him incapable of patience where his feelings were so deeply involved. James persisted in this delicate investigation until Margaret's feeling came as near to resentment as her gentle nature was capable of approaching. She thought that at least her feelings were her own, and sacred from such forcible intrusion; and to find them thus rudely treated made her appear to herself much as if she were a plant torn up by the roots in order to see if it were growing: a process, she felt, that could only do harm if all were going on well; and must be utterly destructive if it were not. Yet for her life she would not consciously have allowed her letters to betray the remotest hint of her relations with her husband. Suffer as she might at his hands, from all the world he was sacred.

Maynard's business kept him for many hours at the works, and Noel became very desirous of returning to the house and renewing his conversation with Margaret. The feeling, however, that he was embarking on a dangerous sea, and might cause her uneasiness by seeming to hasten back to her, made him resist the impulse, and wait until Maynard was ready to accompany him home.

In the mean time Margaret passed the morning hours in a state altogether strange to her. Her apprehensions being as yet unaroused, it was a state of dreamy blissfulness with just

enough of consciousness to enable her to appreciate the novelty of her emotions and to wonder at their meaning. Her life-long perplexity seemed all at once to have become merged in an ecstasy of contentment. To Noel, Margaret was as the conclusion to a search. To her, he was as the key to an enigma. None ever know how vast has been their previous ignorance until they fall in love. It is the revelation of the mystery that lights up the depth of its mysteriousness. Margaret had no idea of having fallen in love; or of love having aught to do with her. She was only aware that she was no longer the same Margaret that she had all along known herself to be. A near and a dear relation was found, whose appearance was enough to convert all hitherto prevailing discords into divinest harmony; and each hour that passed was to her as a silent anthem of gratitude and thanksgiving.

CHAPTER VIII.

For none of those with whom we have to do at *el real de Dolóres*, was there any consciousness of the passage of time. It was with them as if they lived only in the spirit, for their life was at the quick.

When Noel had once become familiar with mining details he rarely visited the works, except for the sake of conversing with Maynard on the way. It was enough for him to have explored the principal shafts and galleries, which extended deep into the mountain; and the indispensable farm far down in the seething *barranca*, where grew the maize that constituted almost the sole food of man and beast. His business, if he had any, was rather with the manager of the mine than with the mine itself. He soon came to comprehend the nature of the misgiving to which his uncle had referred; but he learnt to ascribe Mr Tresham's detection of any peculiarity in James to hints given him by Sophia, rather than to the penetration of the old man himself, who was one of the last to indulge in such metaphysical refinement. Whatever Noel had seen on his first arrival to justify the uneasiness indicated in his uncle's letter, the idea soon vanished, and he gave himself up to the engrossments of his peculiar position.

It was a curiously subjective existence that Margaret, James, and Edmund alike led during the first weeks after Noel's arrival; an existence in which thought and feeling were far more to them than action; and words, which were by no means few, for there was much conversation, referred to anything rather than to that which was uppermost in the minds of the speakers.

A change certainly came over Maynard's manner, and one which it was a happiness to Margaret to ascribe to Noel's influence. Doubtless the association with a companion of his own stamp, after so long an abstinence, was refreshing enough to account for the removal of much of the moodiness which had become habitual with him. But Margaret took a delight in considering him as affected by the same influence which had brought sunshine into her own life. It was only as time went on that she was led to suspect a new reason for his amelioration, and it was one that aroused in her a terrible dread lest he should suspect it also.

Noel soon settled down into a regular routine of life. He devoted the mornings, during which James was absent at the *hacienda*, to reading and writing; to exploring the forest and ravines with his rifle, and preparing any rare birds which he had shot for his museum at home; or to studying Spanish with Margaret, or reading his favourite poems to her. Sometimes he busied himself in inditing verses of his own, an occupation in which she once detected him. But on her charging him with it, he had coloured up and thrust them away in a book, for he had not yet passed that stage in versemaking in which the poet shuns observation inasmuch as, expressing his own inmost emotions, he deems it a domestic operation, and one, therefore, to be performed in private.

Gradually, and in spite of Margaret's reserve on all points connected with her relations with James, Noel came to comprehend fully the measure of their discordance, and to suspect the share he had in dispelling it. The very disappointment which Maynard's marriage brought to him, had only served to intensify his love for Margaret. His longings towards her had never been assuaged, or converted into content by the satisfaction of reciprocity. He worshipped her with an absolute devotion, even while torturing himself, and her too, by the deep and communicable agony of his efforts to win the love that he required of her, and by the manifestation of his resentment at his failure.

It was a perplexing problem to Maynard, and harder than any he had ever before been called on to solve. A problem, too, involving a terrible element of personality. He was convinced of her perfection. He felt himself worthy to be loved. Her own consent clearly was not wanting. In nothing else that he required of her had she failed him. In all the harder mental work of his real life he had found her indeed a helpmeet, willing and able, no matter how dry or laborious the details. Partly for curiosity, partly for real service, he had, soon after their arrival, put some intricate and abstruse calculations into her hands, explaining to her generally their nature, and saying it would save him some time and trouble if he could have them verified by another. She took them, and in her usual silent way pondered over them, until, as if by an instinctive and loving insight into the nature of things, she arrived at the desired comprehension and performed the task allotted.

As mother and housewife, he owned her the most womanly of women in the best sense of the epithet. The report of the servants within the house, and of visitors, caused her dwelling to be regarded in all the country round as one of the holiest of shrines.

The more Maynard owned her perfection, the more he marvelled at the absence of that which was necessary to crown it for him. In his perplexity he recalled a conversation he had once had with Lord Littmass on the subject of his last and unfinished work. The remarks made by the physician also recurred to him.

'And this,' thought James, 'must be the explanation of the mystery. In one grand respect there has been an arrest of her natural development. The energy that would in proper course have been occupied by this part of her nature, has gone to promote the abnormal growth of the rest.'

'Ah, my queen,' he had said to her in his too usual tone of bitter banter in the first flush of this fancied discovery; 'it is buying your glories very dear when they are obtained at the expense of a woman's chiefest excellence, a loving heart. You are but a human snowdrop, nourished by cold and wasted by warmth. How came you by that golden glow in your hair?'

And she, smitten to the heart, knowing herself to be ever striving in secret with prayers and tears to become to him all that he desired, had, with quivering lip and sad attempt to smile, replied,—

'Ah, my Botanist, pulling your poor flower to pieces to see how it is made:' and again,—

'Ah, my Anatomist, if only you could indulge in the delights of vivisection without hurting the poor subject!'

And he, after witnessing the torment that he inflicted, would rush away half mad with remorse, and ready to dash himself to sudden destruction. And when the fever of his emotion passed off, and he returned to her repentant and subdued, he always found her kind and submissive, and earnestly anxious to make him amends for his disappointment in her, although clearly having suffered as acutely as himself.

Since Noel's arrival James had found himself happier in his married life than he had ever been before. Whatever the cause, he was for the present content to enjoy without seeking to know it. 'Perhaps the diversion from a too exclusive devotion to each other,' he thought, 'is good for us. It may not be good for even man and wife to be alone together, always. A new use for children, by the way.' Margaret's observation, however, for once outran his. She was conscious of a change in her demeanour, and suspecting the cause, dreaded lest he also should divine it.

Meanwhile Margaret and Edmund lived by each other, and loved; but never spoke of their love; never acknowledged it to each other, scarcely to themselves, although each was thoroughly penetrated and suffused by the idea of the other. Noel adored the infinite purity and simplicity which still wrapped her round in happy unconsciousness. While the extent of her thought was,—

'If this is what James seeks in me, and is disappointed at not finding,—poor, poor fellow, how he must suffer. I know now how to pity him. I must make it up to him in some way, if only by the simulation of such affection as I have for Edmund.'

For in her privatest thought Noel had come to be 'Edmund' with her, while aloud he was still 'Mr Noel.' She was a little puzzled by the facility with which this came about, for she had had the greatest difficulty in changing from 'Mr Maynard' to 'James.' Perhaps Sophia Bevan had accustomed her to his Christian name; for Sophia always spoke of him as 'Edmund.'

When Margaret first comprehended that the increased tenderness which delighted James was the reflex warmth of the flame kindled by Noel, she, in the happy innocence of her heart, hailed his satisfaction as a testimony to the good wrought

in her by the discovery of the friend and brother who had brought light and life to her soul. And it seemed to her that James also might well love Edmund for the change made in her.

One morning Noel was out in the forest with Margaret. She was reclining on the ground with her infants at the foot of a noble cedar, and he was sitting on one of the arching roots, by turns sketching and reading aloud. High above rode the fierce sun; but down among the giant stems was deep shade and delicious coolness. Maynard was at the mine, the noise of which faintly reached them. Suddenly the party was startled by approaching steps, and a native messenger trotted up to the group and delivered a message to Noel. He could not quite understand the man's dialect, and the message had to be repeated to Margaret. It was to the effect that *el Señor Director* wished to see *el Señor hermano* down at the *hacienda*, if he was at liberty.

Replying that he would follow him immediately, Noel asked Margaret if she could account for his being invested by the people with such a title, and whether he was supposed to be her own brother or James's.

'Oh, not his,' she said, hastily. 'But I don't know how they got the idea, unless it is that they see a likeness.'

'Can it be possible,' he said, with the air of one musing, so as to avoid any direct appeal that might embarrass her, 'can it be possible that they have perceived any external signs of the interior sympathy which we recognised at once as existing between us?'

'I remember,' she replied, 'that soon after you came, my maid said something to me about a resemblance between *la Señora* and *el caballéro*, and I, half joking, half thinking of my first impressions, asked her if it was unusual to have family likenesses in Mexico. She has a *galanteadór* on the works, and no doubt her notion has been communicated to him, and by degrees attained the character of a fact. I hope you are not seriously offended at the imputation of being like me?'

Answering this last remark by a look and a smile, Noel said that he ought to be off to join Maynard, and asked if he should leave her there or escort her back to the house, for he was going thither first to take his books back.

'Oh, leave them here, and I will have them taken in. You had better go to James at once.'

Noel found Maynard in conversation with a messenger who had just brought him important despatches from the capital. They were from his confidential agent, to the effect that in view of the intervention undertaken by the foreign powers in the affairs of Mexico, protection could be no longer guaranteed by the government to the property of foreigners. He added his own conviction that the popular feeling against foreigners was becoming so exasperated that no precaution should be neglected for providing for the security of the mines and convoys. 'For you may be certain,' he concluded, 'that as soon as the temper of the government and people here becomes known throughout the country, you will be overrun with *bandidos*.'

'An ugly look out,' observed Maynard, 'though any guarantee that we have had of protection from government has been little more than nominal. My own well-armed and well-paid guards have been my best protection; though I believe my personal acquaintance with the President has done something. I have no doubt of being able to protect myself by the same means, unless a regular war breaks out. My real anxiety is about the isolated situation of my house. I don't like bringing Margaret to live down here in the enclosure by the *patío;* and it is impossible to prevent the approach of *guerrillas* under cover of the forest.'

Noel listened, expecting Maynard to renew his proposition of sending Margaret and the children to England. The idea, however, did not seem to have recurred to him of late, and he said nothing about it now; and Noel could not help feeling a double pang as he thought of the change and the reason. They had a long conference together, and then a consultation with the sub-officials; when it was resolved to increase the number of the guard and its officers, and to keep scouts on the look out in the neighbourhood; and, in case of reported danger, to place regular patrols round the mountain. After agreeing that nothing more should be said to Margaret than to tell her that the state of the country made additional precaution advisable, Maynard and Noel walked up the hill together.

CHAPTER IX.

THE rest of the day passed much in the usual manner. There was some conversation about the Intervention and its probable results; but Margaret betrayed no curiosity to know why Noel had been summoned to the mine. Her manner, indeed, seemed to him to manifest a shyness and reserve which were new in their intercourse. It was not through any fear of alarming her that James abstained from saying much about the prospects of the country, for he regarded her as possessing one of the strongest and most unyielding of natures, and one that would quail before no danger whatever. It was rather the consciousness that he had hitherto utilised the topic of personal risk to sustain his threatened intention of sending her home, when smarting under the idea of her indifference to him. It was his desire to avoid recalling this disagreeable remembrance to her mind that now kept him silent on the subject of danger.

To dwellers in Mexico at this period, one of the most interesting problems produced by the civil war which had been raging for some time in the United States, was that of the effect which the victory of either side might have upon Mexico, and upon the proposed intervention of Europe in its affairs. While the belief was universal that the country must eventually fall into the hands of its irrepressible neighbours, the period and conditions of that event were the subjects of general and endless discussion. On one point all were agreed; namely, that Intervention was only made possible by the war in the United States.

The subject was mooted that evening in a conversation between Maynard and Noel, and the *padre*, who had come up to learn the news contained in the papers brought by the *corréo*. There had been a great battle and a great victory; and the good old priest, who was a thorough patriot, was unable to view the matter in any other light than that of a struggle between two monsters, of whom the winner would inevitably claim him for a prey. The simple-minded ecclesiastic listened with astonishment to the, to him, novel views and broad principles put forth by the two Englishmen in their discussion of the question at issue. Regarding both parties in the contest as irredeemable heretics and white savages, it was a marvel to him to hear men, whom he had learnt to consider as really superior beings,

any other desire than for the complete mutual exter-
f the contending factions.
wer to a remark of Maynard's, Noel acknowledged
d at first deeply regretted the outbreak of the war
obable disruption of the magnificent fabric of the
adding,—
ow my sympathies are altogether with the South;
that if the South has no right to be freed from the
North had no right to be freed from Great Britain;
inly think the North was justified in that.'
is hardly the view your friends, the philosophical
t home, take of it,' said Maynard.
w it is not, and I think the whole party has gone be-
at the idea of liberty for the negroes, like the bull at
the red flag. If there are to be slaves I would rather
black than white ones.'
urse, the real motive for the part taken by the English
id Maynard, 'is their fear lest republican institutions
ve a failure.'
herefore they sympathise with a republic that is so
that it will not permit another republic, composed of
own people, to exist alongside of it! I take it that
displayed by the North is the best possible justifica-
South.'
ly, you don't believe in negroes?'
eve they will be infinitely better off if the South wins,
North does.
can you possibly think that?'
enough. The South won't give in until completely
or rather exterminated. So that three or four mil-
will suddenly find themselves their own masters.
has not a particle of love for them, and would be
sed than otherwise to get rid of them altogether. I
it requires much gift of prophecy to see that in the
ctory going with the North, starvation, outrage, and
will do a good deal towards thinning out the poor

f the South gain?'
will be compelled, both by the necessity of consolidat-
mpire, and by gratitude to their faithful slaves, to
ure of gradual emancipation. With free-
Southern States, the blacks

'Well, we will at least go and pay a visit of inspection,' he returned, evidently gratified by the exhibition of her solicitude for him. And soon afterwards the party retired for the night, Margaret still retaining her reserve towards Noel.

Edmund passed the night uneasily, feeling as if a cold, dark cloud had suddenly come between him and his sun. Hour after hour he remained awake, feverishly conning over every word and look which had recently passed between him and Margaret in order to discover whether he could have given any cause of offence. He even saw in her anxiety to visit the works next morning, a desire to avoid being left alone with him.

Towards morning he fell into a heavy sleep, from which he was aroused by the clatter of mules' or horses' feet beneath his window. He jumped up and looked out, and, to his surprise and annoyance, saw that the morning was well advanced, and that Margaret had visited the *hacienda* and returned, while he was sleeping.

Hurrying down as soon as possible, he tendered his apologies for his indolence, and his regrets at not having accompanied her, placing his failure to the credit of a bad night.

She was sitting bending over her work, and only lifted her head when he had finished speaking. Turning her beautiful face, flushed with the exercise and keen morning air of the mountain, full upon him, with a wondering expression, she said,—

'Do men have such things? I fancied bad nights were our privilege.'

'It is a privilege extended to all who have souls, I imagine. I never heard of mere animals being endowed with it. Your dog or your mule is not given to lying awake thinking.'

'I sometimes think that they are to be envied,' she replied, rising and ringing a bell. 'At least you must imitate them by having some breakfast, now you are up'

'I am ashamed to make such a breach in the regularity of your household, and I consider that I do not deserve any breakfast this morning. Your ride has almost given you a colour.'

'Your remedy for a sleepless night differs from that which I have been trying,' returned Margaret, looking none the paler for his last remark. 'Your breakfast is waiting for you in the next room.'

CHAPTER X.

After her discovery Margaret avoided Noel all day, and at night she read the verses again. It seemed to her as if they had burnt into her brain, for she already knew them by heart. Sleep came not to her. The hours flew by on noiseless wings, and daylight surprised her as by a premature dawning. She read them again now, while he was at breakfast, and murmured to herself,—

'Then he feels as I feel, and what I feel must be love;—the love that James has so long sought from me in vain. Alas, what shall I do!'

So absorbed was she in her reverie that she forgot to return the paper to its hiding-place, 'but sat with it in her hand gazing into vacancy; sat with it in utter oblivion of all, save her own late-comprehended emotions, until she found Noel standing before her with the look of a conscious culprit.

'Can you forgive me?' he asked.

'Do feelings need forgiveness?'

'Bless you for that,' he said; 'but my carelessness—I would not for the world give you the pain that—that——'

'I do not yet know,' she interrupted, 'whether I would rather be without the pain or not. Everything is so new, so strange to me, that I cannot tell what to think or say. Please let me be silent, and—and put these away.'

And giving him back the verses, with an appealing look, she placed her hand in his.

He kissed it with the fervent respect of reverential worship, and seated himself beside her in silence. For some time neither spoke. At length Margaret said,—

'What does it mean?'

'It means that you and I are at once the most happy and the most miserable of human beings.'

'But I,' she returned, 'have been happy all the time, and have not known the misery.'

'But James——'

'James, too, has been the happier. He always thought me a hard, unfeeling creature, until lately. I am not consciously different to him now, but I suppose my nature has undergone a change, and he——'

'He gets the benefit of our affection, without suspecting its cause,' exclaimed Noel, with vehemence.

'Yes; do you think he would mind?' asked Margaret, simply.

Noel was too much affected by the spectacle of the pure innocence revealed by her question, to answer at once.

'He is so good,' continued Margaret, 'that he cannot be angry at what is not wrong. And our love cannot be wrong, for I have given thanks for it in my prayers every night and morning, since I first saw you. Surely you do not think it wrong?'

'Not wrong, certainly. But, as I said before, most unfortunate in our meeting only when too late.'

'Ah!' she cried, as if pierced by a sudden shaft, 'I never thought of what might have been. Why—why did you put it into my mind?'

Noel was silent. Presently she exclaimed,—

'I must try and go back to my dream. I was so happy in it. It is my first and only one. But for you,' she added, with an effort at archness, 'your loves have been as the steps of Jacob's ladder which reached from earth to heaven. Can you be quite sure that I shall remain the topmost one?'

Clearly she did not yet realise the serious character of the situation. Noel resolved not to precipitate such knowledge, so he said,—

'And this is the reason of your avoiding me all day yesterday, and going off this morning without me?'

'Yes, I shrank from letting anything break in upon the current of my thoughts, lest the spell should be broken. But we shall have to leave our hilltop and go down to the *hacienda* to live, at least until the country becomes more settled.'

'Well, you know the poem that says, "Love is of the valley;" but where will you live there?'

'A house can be soon got ready in a remote corner of the enclosure, where we shall be more secure and but little inconvenienced by the people and the noise. James and I chose the spot this morning. There is a noble oak close by on which you must make a swing for the children.'

'Am I to go there, too? I feared you were dismissing me.'

Turning on him a look of pure and deep affection, Margaret said,—

'You think, then, that I ought to send you away?'

'No, no; action is for me, not for you, if any action ought to be taken,' he returned.

'I am so content,' said Margaret, 'in the possession of my new idea and feeling that I require nothing but to remain perfectly passive and enjoy my thoughts.'

'I have the same feeling,' said Noel, 'but I fear that it would not long outlast our parting. It may be that at first the separation would scarcely seem real, and one would continue to be for a time entirely pervaded and possessed by a sentiment that seems to be an essential part of oneself. If I go away now, the feeling gradually, perhaps, but surely, will come upon me that I have left my soul behind me, and my misery will be proportioned to the uncertainty of our meeting again.'

Margaret shuddered as he spoke of a possible separation.

'I used sometimes,' she said, 'when watching the sea ebbing from my little bay at Porlock, to think of its going out farther and farther, with no hope of a flow, and leaving the whole world bare and dry. It seems to me that my heart would be the same if you were to go away. I could not control myself unless you were by to help me. If the knowledge would grieve James, he would be more likely to find it out then than now. You must leave me those verses, and if he does find it out, I must make him read them, and then he will not be angry.'

'How so?' asked Noel.

'Because then he will see that I cannot help loving you, any more than the others named there.'

'I am afraid that he would hardly be satisfied even then,' returned Edmund, with a smile. 'But do you not know that people who love always consider themselves bound to hate any other person who may have preceded them?'

'No. Why should they?'

'You have never heard of such a feeling as jealousy?'

'I do not think I should be jealous of your affection for any one else, more than one flower is jealous of another for the sun shining on it.'

'But they would say that you were not properly in love unless you wanted the love all to yourself.'

'Ah, I see. Jealousy implies a limitation; a belief that there is not enough for all. To the jealous their love is not as a sun, the boundless source of light and heat; but a poor taper whose dim and scanty rays must be carefully husbanded.

Jealousy, too, must mean envy. Your friends' husbands must have felt that, had they known.'

Noel was on the point of saying,—

'And do you think the husband is not to be envied in his turn?' but he read Margaret too well to say a word that might arouse any apprehension that their relations could prove injurious to James's happiness, or her own self-respect.

It was probably Noel's faculty of reticence, almost as much as his faculty of sympathy, that won for him an entrance into so many hearts. The repose of his nature lulled the suspicion of man and woman alike. To love and not to show it, was his nature. To be loved without making effort to win it, was his fate. A dread power, whether for himself or for those with whom he came into contact. Margaret owned the fascination, but felt that she would have been superior to it unless it had been accompanied by a character that won her esteem. It was her very confidence in the force and genuineness of Edmund's conscientiousness that, unconsciously to herself, allowed her whole heart to escape to him, without any misgiving as to the perfect propriety of her submission to the spell. In loving him she felt that she was not derogating from her allegiance to the Beautiful and the Good.

But there was something more than likeness of nature that attracted Margaret and Edmund to each other. His presence had chased away the unhappiness which, manifestly to him, clouded her life in spite of her efforts to conceal it. To him she owed the birth of all that had ever been bright in her life. The sympathy of nature, which enabled him to pass weeks in her constant society without once speaking slightingly or reproachfully to her, struck her as a marvel.

'James thinks it good for me to be scolded sometimes,' she had said, playfully. 'He fears to spoil me by too much good-nature.' But, in the quiver on her lip and the tear in her eye, Noel read her gratitude to himself for his unvarying kindness and deference towards her.

With her little fairy offspring clasping the glories of her neck, she had said,—

'This has always been my greatest delight. I think that when I feel these darlings clinging to me I am perfectly happy.' And Noel saw that the joy of the mother was accepted as a compensation for the trials of the wife. But he gained no in-

sight into the mystery, not even when on asking if James was fond of children, she said that he thought it a mistake their coming so soon and so often. Nor was he much enlightened when wandering in the forest one holiday Maynard himself observed, with a certain irritation in his tone,—

'Margaret is not a woman, and has no business with children. I scarcely consider her their mother;' and left Noel to wonder whether he was merely expressing his own bitterness; or whether, suspecting him of an over-esteem for her, he wished to lower her in his regard.

To Margaret herself James did not hesitate to declare his opinion of her lack of womanly qualities; and the contrast between his view and that which led Edmund to invest her with all possible perfections, could not fail to confirm and strengthen her attachment.

Thus it was the old fable of the wind and the beam over again, as it was in the beginning and ever will be to the end. While all force failed to penetrate to the depths of her nature, she unwittingly threw them wide open to the genial sunshine of a perfect sympathy. Her whole life, and idea of life, were now so different to any that she had before imagined, that she could not but wonder how it might have been had James, at the first commencement of their union, endeavoured to win her by patience and forbearance instead of compelling her by angry reproaches.

No formal communication was made to Noel by either side respecting the characters and mutual relations of his friends. It was only by putting together the half-uttered allusions and suggestions which fell undesignedly from one or the other, and reading them by the light of his own intuitions, that he arrived at any consistent theory on the subject.

As for Maynard, it was hardly to be expected that the severe student, the keen analyst, the daring experimenter in all other domains of nature, should hesitate to apply his usual successful method of investigation when a woman's heart or his own happiness was the subject. What was the use of his science if it could not ascertain and repair a defect of feeling? If an obscure phrase of an ancient author could be torn to pieces and reduced to its constituent elements until it yielded its meaning to the pestle and mortar of criticism, why should not the secret of a heart be got at by a similar process? And had he not a sure testimony to its efficacy in the comprehension

of his own nature to which his ecclesiastical and historical researches had already led him?

Of the sympathy that is justice, Maynard knew and felt much; but to the sympathy that is patience he was a stranger. Life is short and truth is infinite; therefore, for him, the earnest student must be ever impatient and unresting. Thus, the effect of James's character and treatment was to withdraw Margaret from nearly all her old instinctive devout aspiration and trust, and land her in a world of bewildering and tormenting perplexity with an omnipotent Vivisector for its ruling deity; until it came that life for her meant torture, and the very birth of her children was hailed only as bringing danger and a chance of escape by the gates of death.

James's peculiar education had developed another element in his character, which had served to surround Margaret with darkness until she was irrevocably committed. It showed itself in a certain priestly mysticism in his conversations with her, that suppressing altogether the real nature of their relations under their coming marriage, led her to view their union as a purely spiritual and intellectual one. No doubt the influence of her own intense purity and unconsciousness had something to do with his reserve in this respect; but it was not the less a most serious error in a man who wanted a woman, and not a beatified spirit, for his wife. His conviction, that if she had known all she would not have accepted him, involved his own moral condemnation. Knowing her nature to be what it was, it was his duty to think for both;—if he could have thought; but, alas! love and fear hid this from him. But having won her assent under a false pretence, he should at least have had patience with her until her heart was grown and they stood side by side upon the same level. Failing to win the love that he wanted, he availed himself of the profound compassionateness of her nature, to obtain through pity for his sufferings a consideration unprompted by love; and then he tormented both himself and her either by his remorse for his selfishness, or by his reproaches for the coldness of her nature, and his misfortune in having married her. Margaret could not even boast, as it may be hoped many a wife can boast, on recalling her bridal days, 'Ah, we were so happy at first.' A fancied reluctance to take his arm on leaving the church after their marriage had made him seize her by the wrist and almost drag her along, saying, 'You belong to me now!' At that moment she felt

that she would have given worlds to be free. But her fate was fixed, and her perfect goodness made her recoil from any rebellion against her new duties; for she felt that it was her duty to make the best of the situation. Doubtless, she would have conquered, if he would but have let her! Surely not in vain would have been all her tears, and prayers, and struggles, all the humiliations and chastisements of soul, by which she sought to bring herself into conformity with his will, had she only had herself to control. Backed by a little forbearance, a little self-suppression on his part, the victory might have been won. A little resolution, trifling in comparison with that which she was ever exercising, would have saved their happiness from total wreck. But he, of whose studies the mystery of the affections had formed no part, could only answer her piteous appeal,—'I am indeed trying to love you as you wish. Only give me time,'—by bitter taunts for having spoiled his life by marrying him when she knew that she did not love him, by the forced exhibition, on the most trivial pretext, of a jealousy which he did not really feel, or by ascribing her conduct to wilful indifference, until in the last exhaustion of her fortitude she would exclaim,—

'Oh James, what an Inquisitor was lost in you. The flesh cannot heal while mangled and bleeding beneath the knife of the surgeon; and my heart cannot grow when plucked out by the roots and exposed to your bitter mocking sarcasms.'

Thus all the miseries were here summed up which ever cursed a marriage between a man of ardent temperament and advanced imagination, and a girl who, though a woman of women in capacity of intellect and conscience, remained a child in all other respects. Had Maynard but said, 'I have waited for years to secure her person; it is now my task to develop and win her heart,' and so laboured patiently in silence and hope, seeking to win her love by an exhibition of the highest beauty of which his character was capable, it cannot but be that all would have gone well, and he would sooner or later have triumphed in her submission.

Yet it was even while charging her with being cold and haughty, and unwomanly in her incapacity for love, that he adored her as an absolute perfection. Knowing that no one had ever yet elicited any response from her heart, he refused to ascribe it to a positive defect in her nature, and came rather to wish that she might experience a grand passion for some one,

believing that it would soften her towards himself by teaching her to comprehend his suffering. He was first led to fancy that Noel might be the man who was destined to touch her heart, by observing a decrease in the amount and freedom of their conversation together. 'They seem to understand each other, for they have got past the talking stage,' was his reflection; but he had no idea how well they understood each other; and Noel, who perceived the blunder of indulging in silence, renewed the habit of conversation with such animation as to almost efface the suggestion from James's mind.

CHAPTER XI.

So anxious was Noel to keep Maynard from having any suspicion of his relations with Margaret, that he proposed to accompany the next convoy of treasure sent to Tampico for shipment, saying that he wished to see as much as possible of the country and its ways, and that it would probably be his only opportunity of seeing that part, as whenever he returned to England his route would be by Mexico and Vera Cruz.

'And by the time you come back, the new house will be ready for us,' said Margaret, affecting a gaiety which she did not feel, in obedience to his exhortations on the necessity of concealing their attachment from James.

'If you like to go you can,' said Maynard; 'but I warn you that you will have a rough time. I shall not send the train until the beginning of the year, so that you will have an opportunity of seeing my Christmas festival. You have no notion how kindly my Mexicans, Cornishmen, and Indians, all alike take to my revival of sun-worship.'

'They understanding it as such?' asked Noel.

'Well, not quite; but I have got them to see that in celebrating the day of its return they have at least one basis of agreement, and this has prevented their quarrelling so much. I tell the *padre* that if his Spanish ancestors had only gone on the principle of dwelling on their points of resemblance instead of on their points of difference, with the Aztec populations

whom they found in possession, the conquest of Mexico might have had a very different aspect in history.'

'Did you make him understand how?'

'I represented to him generally that the *prestige* with which the whites were regarded, in consequence of the prophecies which had long led the natives to expect a superior race from the East, would have enabled them to convert the religion which they found here into a fair imitation of their own. They found the cross adored as the emblem of fertility, and they found human sacrifices practised. What more easy than to have spiritualised the cross, and convinced the people that they came to proclaim the good tidings that all possible sacrifice was already long ago accomplished and consummated, so that any further sacrifice was superfluous and worthless? But, as is not unfrequently the case, the Christians did not understand their own religion; and their ignorance and avarice deluged with blood the world they had discovered.'

Maynard was particularly anxious about this festival. The time of the Intervention was very near, and he hoped by the exhibition of a comprehensive hospitality and charity to avert, at least from his own mine and his projected convoy, any risk arising from the popular indignation against foreigners. Already in presence of the growing embarrassment of the Government, were the wandering bands of robbers reported to be more numerous and more frequent; and Margaret was in her heart alarmed at the thought of Edmund being exposed to the dangers of the attacks which the convoy was likely to encounter; although, of course, in her imagination, she invested him she loved with all the attributes of a hero of romance, and could by no means imagine sickness, danger, or death laying a finger upon him without being worsted by him in the encounter. He dwelt for her in the regions of the Ideal, and she could not imagine aught as derogating from his supremacy. For her he was prescient and omnipotent, for the intensity of their sympathies made her feel herself to be transparent to his vision, and his boundless care over her, manifested in the minutest details of their life as by preternatural foresight and without effort, made danger or disaster seem impossible when he was at hand.

There was nothing in which Noel's character and manner failed to present him in startling contrast with Maynard. From the smallest details of daily life to their very relations with the

Infinite, they were as two beings of different race and nature. Whatever Noel had of self-consciousness he owed to Sophia Bevan, and he always in his inner mind felt something of a grudge against her for the enlightenment which her vivacious friendship had forced upon him. Yet he felt that he was thereby enabled to comprehend the character of Maynard, and to see how morally impossible was any real approach between natures so essentially antagonistic as those of James and Margaret. For in Margaret he saw the feminine of himself; while James was the masculine counterpart of Sophia, the world being left out.

As the hopelessness of his friend's happiness grew upon Noel, and the conviction that the love between Margaret and himself, however delicious to them, could not but have an unhappy result, became stronger and stronger, the thought occurred to him that he might contrive to suggest to Maynard the advisability of his trying, by a course of self-discipline, to mould himself more into conformity with Margaret's nature. It was clear that he had failed to convert her to his own side, notwithstanding her own earnest strivings in the same direction. If now she were to see him endeavouring to come over to her at the cost of a suppression of himself, he would at least earn her gratitude, whether successful in the attempt or not.

It was during one of the notable conversations which they were in the habit of holding either in the shade of the forest or in the verandah of their dwelling, that the idea of thus utilising his theory occurred to Noel. The occasion had made itself, so that there was no need to broach the subject abruptly or specially. They were discussing the meaning of Individuality, and the origin of Character, Margaret, as usual, sitting by and working. Maynard regarded it as the effort of the universal indwelling Consciousness to *differentiate* itself into distinct personalities—a theory which, he held, made it the duty of everybody to develop his own distinctive character to the utmost.

Noel thought it unscientific to postulate such universal consciousness, except as potential. 'There must be something to be conscious; and that something may have a capacity of existing in a state of unconsciousness. Consciousness may thus be only the result of a certain condition of things which are capable of existing without it;—acquiring it under certain circumstances, and losing it under others. Thus, what is vulgarly called Matter may be the universal and eternal; and

consciousness, or mind, only an occasional result of its arrangement.'

'Of course,' said Maynard, 'the whole problem of the Universe consists in a question of priority; the question whether intelligence is the result of mechanics, or mechanics of intelligence. But it will save you a deal of trouble to adopt the phraseology I have used. We cannot, of course, imagine a capacity for thinking, independently of something which possesses that capacity and thinks. People use the word Matter only to express that which cannot think. But we have no proof that anything exists which cannot think. Apparent motionlessness does not disprove the presence of thought, or of consciousness. And we know that something exists which does think. Whether anything appears to us to be alive and conscious, or not, we still allow it to be a Force, inasmuch as it, somehow, makes us conscious of its existence. And wherever there is Force we find it operating, or not operating, towards certain ends. Add intelligence to Force, and you arrive at conscious Force. What else is this but Will? What right have you to deny that wherever you find Force, there also is intelligence? The accident of that Force deeming it right to be passive under certain conditions, or to practise the regularity of sequence which we call Law, does not justify you in denying it the possession of intelligence.'

'Certainly not; but as we can imagine nothing analogous to what we understand by Will apart from animal life, I doubt if we gain anything by applying the same term to two such different things. I am inclined to prefer the old-fashioned term, God.'

'If you can detach your mind from popular errors in respect to it, you cannot do better. But the anthropomorphism of theology is almost invincible, even with the most scientific habit of mind.'

'Well, then, God, the Universal, separates Himself, as it were, into a number of limited individuals. Of course the parts cannot rival the whole in their comprehension of things. Now, where you say that Individuality, or distinctiveness of character, is a thing to be maintained and developed, I should say it is quite as much a thing to be amended and regulated. Being placed here in certain conditions, it is for our happiness that we bring ourselves into conformity with those conditions.'

'Happiness!' said Maynard, somewhat bitterly; 'what has

happiness to do with it? I take life to be a process, rather than an indulgence. It is a form of Force, or Will. If we have characters at all, it is for us to develop and act them out; and rather to force circumstances to conform to them.'

'Hence the multiplicity of troubles and contests in the world,' said Noel; people won't respect accomplished facts.'

'No fact is irreversible,' returned Maynard, blocking further discussion in that direction with paradox.

'Can you, as a married man, maintain that?' asked Noel, laughing, while Margaret trembled on seeing the direction he was taking.

'It is altogether premature,' returned James, 'for man, who is, immediately, a product of the earth and of forces residing in it, to expect to exist in mutual harmony with his surroundings, when the earth itself is at perpetual war with itself. Sea and land are always encroaching upon each other. Fire and water are constantly contending together, and producing the *terretremos* which so often rock us to sleep at night. The fact is, man has come into existence before the whole of the earth is quite ready for his reception; and it would indicate that worst of faults in children, precocity, were he to pretend to an advance beyond his great progenitor. I hold it to be as much the business of characters to clash, as it is of the elements. It is only by the contention working itself out to the bitter end that equilibrium can be attained.'

'It is clear,' answered Noel, 'that you don't hold even to the old plan of meeting things half-way. Yet to reject all compromise looks very much like an assertion of infallibility. Moreover, your premises seem to me inconsistent with your inference, for you started by postulating an universal Intelligence substanding all phenomena, and expressing itself through them. Of course such a Being must be in agreement with itself?'

'Well?'

'And therefore we are most like it when we succeed in attaining a similar harmony in respect of the other components of our great whole. So that we have a duty, and a reward in the happiness that follows its performance.'

'You omit,' answered James, 'the most important half of my thesis. I said that if Deity *differentiates* himself into man, it is for man, not to resist the decree, but rather to assist it, by encouraging divergencies of individual character. Equilibrium, whether in physics or in morals, means rest: and rest

means cessation from progress. For man to seek toward that, is to court a return to the infinite bosom from which he has sprung, and so to counteract the decree which gave him birth. You would anticipate the *Nirvana* of the Buddhists, which is identical with absorption into Deity, and practical annihilation.'

'Whence it appears,' returned Noel, 'that man's whole duty towards God is to hate his neighbour.'

'Certainly. Why else is he man? So much for the Socratic method of reaching a conclusion.'

'The method may be Socratic, but the result is Calvinistic,' said Noel, 'for it exalts the individual will above individual right.'

'You cannot,' returned Maynard, 'separate individuality from force. I am disposed to believe that those only who have sufficient strength of character can survive this life and continue hereafter. To be great and achieve much, a man must have such force; and the minor eccentricities of his career ought not to be closely scrutinised. The idiosyncracies of genius are necessarily beyond general comprehension. No, I can conceive the strong man enduring for ever, carried on by the power of his individuality to other spheres of existence, while the feeble and the timid droop and fail by the way. Thus the very villains of history may reach their climax long hereafter, when the timid votaries of the moralities have shrunk and vanished!'

'Your hypothesis exalts force of action, and ignores force of resistance,' said Noel. 'I hope, however, that practically you accord to others the same right that you claim for yourself, of development in a direction opposite to your own.'

'It is the greatest mistake to descend from generals to particulars,' returned Maynard. 'The beauty of discussing things in the abstract is, that it does not tend to promote self-consciousness, which I take to be one of the most objectionable of all frames of mind.'

'Yet I can imagine,' said Edmund, laughing, 'cases in which self-examination may become a duty in spite of its requiring self-denial. And, seriously, I really do not see how it is possible to apply the golden rule successfully without a little of it, especially in those cases in which the happiness of those with whom we are connected, may depend upon the manner in which we assert or suppress our individuality.'

Noel had approached as close to the delicate ground as he could venture to go without betraying that he had a design in

what he said. He felt every tremor of Margaret's thrilling through him, and knew that she was dreading the issue of the conversation, for she was well aware that nothing would irritate James so much as a suspicion that he was being covertly talked at. Maynard himself, too, seemed disinclined to let it go any farther, for he wound it up by remarking—

'Even the golden rule is not without its exceptions, unless you are prepared to allow that a man is justified in kissing any woman he likes, on the plea that he wants her to kiss him in return!'

CHAPTER XII.

Noel perceived so great a difference in Margaret since his arrival, and especially since the revelation of their love to each other, that he could not but marvel at Maynard's continued blindness. It was true that the critical nature of the times, and the importance of the interests at stake, were sufficient to fully occupy the thoughts of most men in his position; but they were not enough, Noel thought, to blind such a man as Maynard, on a subject which ranked with him above all others in heaven or earth. Noel ascribed it, therefore, to a settled conviction of the impossibility of Margaret ever being touched by the infirmity of a human affection.

The terms which Maynard had established with his miners, were of a somewhat whimsical order; but his position was that of an autocrat, and his subjects were only too grateful for his treatment of them. The Catholic portion of them, of course, had their regular *padre* to superintend their spiritual interests. The British labourers, with the exception of a few who belonged to that most ubiquitous of the races of men, the Scotch, were all from Cornwall. These were under the guidance of one of their own number, who, in his own estimation, and that of those concerned, was gifted with a 'call.'

The one occasion in the year on which Maynard took any part in the religious services of his people, was on Christmas Day. On that day, he and Margaret, with their children, descended betimes to the *hacienda*, and joined in the devotions,

pastimes, and festivities appointed for the occasion, without partiality or distinction.

Noel, who, of course, accompanied them on this occasion, was vastly amused at finding himself attending, first, the simple ministrations of the 'local preacher' of the Cornishmen, and listening to the provincial dialect, vehement adjurations, and uncouth anthems of the leader and his congregation; and then, the specially ornate services in the Catholic chapel. To his remark that the latter seemed to take him back to a period of pure idolatrous pagan symbolism, Maynard replied that the strong doctrines of the 'local preacher' struck him as the most symbolical of the two, and as certainly not less idolatrous or pagan. Both parties believed their doctrines or ceremonies to *be the* truth, instead of merely *representing a* truth, and both erred in importing into religion, which was properly a matter of mental deportment, much that belonged to the profoundest metaphysics known to philosophy.

'It is far less offensive to me,' he said, 'to see the simple, childish ritual of these semi-savage Mexicans, who don't pretend to understand anything about it, than to listen to the presumptuous attempts of yonder preacher, to evolve the mystery of the Godhead out of the shallows of his own consciousness. I had some conversation with him once. I saw that he was one of those slightly educated men who, on the strength of a certain vividness of idea, are given to believe in their own inspiration, and take for infallible truth whatever is suggested to their minds by a text. He suits the calibre of his disciples, however, and so I said nothing to shake his belief in himself.'

'Yet if you could enlighten him a bit, you might enlighten them through him.'

'Enlighten an uneducated and self-constituted preacher! My dear fellow, you must have dwelt hitherto in the wildest regions of imagination, for such an idea even to occur to you.'

'Do you know how he takes your going to both services?'

'Yes; he spoke of it once, when I purposely encouraged him to do so, in order to give myself an opportunity of suggesting that there may be deeper depths in heaven and earth, than he has succeeded in fathoming. He said, with many apologies, that the respect which I showed to an idolatrous worship, was a stumbling-block to his hearers, which he was unable to remove, and he hoped I would not take offence at his naming it to me. I, of course, praised him for telling me; and desired

him always to come to me whenever he had a difficulty which troubled him, as nothing was so pleasant to me, as helping those who are really anxious to learn. And then I inquired, for there is nothing like the Socratic method with uneducated people, what he meant by idolatry, and what he meant by worship. He seemed somewhat surprised, but made answers which were just as capable of application to his own practice, as to the grossest superstition, for he applied the terms of which I had requested his interpretation, to the offering of respect to the Deity as represented by symbols. He asked if I did not consider images and paintings as grosser symbols than words and ideas. I said, by no means necessarily so; but that if they are, their use only implies that their users have not yet attained his more advanced degree of intelligence, but are like children, who gain their ideas by means of figures and pictures, before they can understand books and sermons; and that charity, if nothing else, should prevent his grudging children the use of such means as they are able to appreciate; and that there may be other beings who look down upon even his mode of faith and practice, just as he seemed to look down upon these. He did not seem quite to take this in, for he said he sometimes wondered how the Almighty could stand their goings on, which seemed to him so degrading; but I cut him short by saying, in the manner of one of the old Rabbinical stories, "Yet you see that not only He does stand it, but He has also given us in His works, images, more or less express, of Himself, and I think that if He has patience with them, we ought to have the same, at least so long as they do not interfere with us."'

'And he was satisfied?'

'Not quite, for he asked me to supply him with a text to justify him in tolerating idolaters. I told him that there are so many, that the only difficulty is in choosing, but that if he would select an author I would try to satisfy him. He, of course, named Paul first; and then, as if remembering himself, he named Jesus. So I gave him these:—"There are diversities of operations, but the same God worketh all in all." "Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat," from Paul; and, "He that is not against us is on our part," from Jesus. He does not seem to have digested them yet, for he has never come to consult me again. I believe he has kept aloof out of mere pride, for there is nothing in the

world so overweening, as the conceit of an illiterate sectarian preacher, who thinks he knows the Bible because he has studied no other book, and least of all that of nature.'

It was after the religious services of Christmas morning, that they sat talking thus in the verandah of Maynard's office, while, without, preparations were being made for the games of the day, and, within, Margaret was arranging the prizes, of which she had the distribution.

'How many days do you allow them?' asked Noel.

'The holiday occupies three days altogether, but we come down only on the second and principal one. Yesterday, the morning was passed in a church festival, which was something between our ancient mysteries and a game of hide-and-seek; for there was a series of processions of parties making a show of hunting in all directions for lodgings, either on pretence of finding a suitable birthplace for the sun after the winter solstice, or in commemoration of Joseph and Mary looking for quarters at Bethlehem; and everybody all the time devouring sweetmeats. This was followed up by a sort of *carnevál*, with a good deal of eating and drinking, and dancing. To-day we have our games; and to-morrow everybody does as he likes; and the day after, all hands are glad to get to work again. You have brought your rifle down with you, I see; so you must try for one of the prizes. As I have forbidden bull-fighting, which is what they care most for, I try to make it up to them in other ways.'

'But yonder maypole is an anachronism, surely?' said Noel, pointing to a lofty pole, whose summit was decorated with maize and evergreens.

'It would be so, much farther north, but here the sun gains strength so quickly after the shortest day, that I consider the festival in honour of fruitfulness to be more appropriate to Christmas than to May. In these latitudes the waxing sun has no long periods of infancy to struggle through before attaining its ripening powers. The descent into the lower parts of the earth is applicable to the regions of long winter nights. You see I modify the calendar as I approach the equator.'

'Pray how far have you revealed your heliastic proclivities to your people?'

'I have had a good deal of talk with the *padre* on the subject, and he has impressed them with the belief that I, though technically a heretic, am yet a good Catholic, in that I worship

the Creator of the universe, the Lord of heaven and earth, of life and death, and accept the Sun as His permanent and efficient representative, very much in the same sense as the Church does. I always give him the wax candles for his altar, telling him that the custom comes from the good old symbolical worship of the Pillar and the Flame. Between ourselves, I have opened his eyes wonderfully about the real meaning of things which he has been taught to look upon as incomprehensible, if not irrational dogmas, and he is rather surprised and glad to find there is so much meaning in them. My having been in Rome, gives me immense authority with him, and I believe his people give me credit for having a mysterious influence with the Pope. Here he is.—Good morning, father. Are the preparations nearly complete?'

'Ah, *señor mio muy querido*, your goodness makes all happy who serve your excellency,' and so on, with Spanish profusion of politeness, but with evidently more than Spanish genuineness, the good old priest answered Maynard. And they chatted together until the scene assumed a lively aspect. The whole population of the *Real* flocked from the surrounding cottages into the *hacienda*, the native men gay with their brightest coloured *serapes*, and vying with their women in brilliancy of adornment; and troops of children, little swarthy creatures, for the most part of pure Indian blood; a few Indians from the north, in their feathers and paint; and, curiously contrasting with these, the whole colony of Cornishmen, in their clean but sombre attire.

'It is an odd thing,' remarked Maynard to Noel and Margaret, as they stood watching the accumulation of the motley crowd, 'that our countrymen always look best when their dress is at its ugliest.'

'Power has no need of variety of colour to set it off to the best advantage. Its effect would be weakened by being broken up into many hues. In painting, I always have to express force and weight by solid masses of one colour, and that generally a dark one.'

This was Margaret's remark. James said—

'And you are quite right. A mountebank who excels in agility generally appears in many colours. These heavy fellows from Cornwall have little agility, but no Mexican will tackle them in wrestling. They cannot stand their downright weight and strength. On the other hand, a Mexican knife would soon

find out a Cornishman's ribs, if it depended on his agility to avoid it.'

After due obeisance by the assembled populace to the party in the verandah, the sports commenced. The feats of wrestling, racing, lasso-throwing, and mock fights by the men, and the dancing by the women and children, were wound up by a shooting-match, in which Noel took part, and, to the great delight of the young native women, who admired him immensely, gained the first prize. Feastings followed, and then the rewards were distributed by Margaret, not the least portion of the estimation in which they were held, being derived from the fact that they came from her hands. It was a remarkable tribute to the nature of the feeling which she inspired, that, while the men all adored her, the women were not jealous of her. She seemed, by the ethereal essence of her nature, to be so far removed from the range of ordinary humanity, as to arouse feelings nearest akin to those with which they regarded their patron saints.

Maynard stood near as she awarded the prizes, and enjoyed no less the devout admiration manifested in the looks of the fortunate winners, than the calm grace and half-abstracted air with which she performed her part. He noted also the contrast between the elegant and self-assured manner of the natives, and the clumsy timidity of his Cornishmen, and confessed to himself that he preferred the qualities indicated by the latter. Presently his ear caught the words—

'*He acquí el bello señor! el bello hermano della Señora!*'—running through the crowd, and Noel stepped forward, and bending one knee before Margaret, received as his reward something that she had specially worked for the occasion. And Maynard learnt, from the exclamations of the crowd, that Noel was generally regarded as Margaret's brother; and from the ineffable expression of Margaret's face, as she placed the prize in his hands, that she regarded Edmund as she had never regarded himself, for he had never before beheld that expression upon her face. And it was the very expression of which he had come to believe her incapable, and which he had more and more coveted for himself as the belief grew upon him.

CHAPTER XIII.

Soon after the distribution of the prizes, James and Margaret started homewards, and Noel remained to join in the dances with which the day was to be concluded. It was not his own wish to do so, for he would never have been an hour longer than he could help it absent from Margaret's side. The power of her attraction was constant, and effort was ever required to withstand it. It was by no process of reasoning that he, on the present occasion, came to a determination to remain behind her at the *hacienda*. He had an instinctive conviction that it was on many accounts the best thing to do, and the subtle sympathy by which he read Margaret, told him that she would prefer his doing so. He said, in a loud, cheerful voice as they went—

'I suppose I shall not see you again to-night. So good-bye for to-day.'

And he knew by her grateful face that he was doing exactly what she had longed to ask him to do: and the relief she had gained by his sympathetic self-denial, well repaid him for exercising it.

It is true that Margaret could not have clearly described her own feeling or motive; but she read in James's look or manner, that which told her that he had entered upon one of those curious fits of moody rumination which now and then made escape from all society necessary to him; and she did not doubt that, whatever the cause might be, she would have to bear the brunt of it.

Of this, however, Noel knew nothing. Ever perfect in her loyalty to James, Margaret admitted no confidence with another concerning their relations. All that touched him was sacred. It was the sole fault that even women found with her. She would not make him a subject for gossip. It was far more by what fell from Maynard, than from her, that Noel inferred the true state of the case. She bore the burden of a love to which she could not respond. Her face grew pale and wan beneath the efforts she made to endure it, and no cry came from the depths of her struggling soul, but that which daily ascended in silence to heaven: 'Oh, for a life that consists in action, in place of this one of passive endurance;' and she felt that even if she had been able to return James's love, her

trial would have been almost as great. All her genuine regard for him did not blind her to the fact that love with him,—such love, at least, as she inspired in him,—rather irritated than softened his character, and that the result would have been to wear them both out.

They rode in silence up the steep that led homewards, Margaret feeling the cloud of James's evident dissatisfaction shadowing her heart; and he, angry with her and with himself also. Slowly and steadily their mules picked their way along the narrow track, as they proceeded in single file through the thick pine forest, whose gloom was now deepened by the night that was fast falling on the mountain. The strains of music from the festival accompanied them far on the way, but produced no corresponding joy. Conversation between riders who are not abreast of each other, necessitates shouting; and James, even if he wished to speak to Margaret, could not shout what he had to say. So the silence continued until they emerged from the forest, into the clearing before the house. Then James urged his mule up close to Margaret's, and said to her, 'Margaret, I have been deceived in you. You *can* love.'

She knew not how the revelation had come to him, or to what he referred. She was too much accustomed to his upbraidings to be taken by surprise, least of all now, when she was watching the gathering of the storm. The direction which it took was, however, quite a new one, and Margaret paused in surprise before replying.

She had often wished for a faculty of gentle banter, with which to chase away his evil moods; but she had ever felt too much pain to return him a light answer. This time an unwonted spirit sustained her, and she said—

'Then you will be content at last, for you have often made my incapacity a serious charge against me.'

'I am wrong,' he said to himself; 'or at least she is as yet unconscious of her own feelings. What an idiot I am to put it into her head.'

Nothing more was said. On entering the house, James betook himself to his study, and Margaret went to her children's room. They were yet awake, and, dismissing the servant for the night, she clasped them passionately.

'Ah, me,' she murmured, as she kissed them; 'I *can* love, and I do. Thank God. Thank God.'

And replacing them in their cots, she seated herself beside

them; and as they sank into sleep, she fell into a reverie which lasted until long past her usual bedtime. Then, leaving them, she went into her own adjoining room, and dressed as she was, lay down on her bed, not knowing what she did, and was soon lost in a deep slumber.

CHAPTER XIV.

NOEL, secure in his love, and scarce envying even Maynard the superior rights which he held—for was not the soul of his beloved his own?—abandoned himself to the enjoyment of the evening's revelries. He had the pick of the prettiest girls to dance with: he chatted with the men; raced and played with the children; and, in short, made himself the idol and soul of the party, until the time came when all must cease; and then he jumped upon his mule and started up the hill, hoping to find his way to bed without disturbing any one in the house.

The moon had disappeared from all the lower region of that side of the mountain on which the *hacienda* was situated. As Noel ascended the mountain he emerged into its light. Strange and weird to him seemed the long horizontal bars of alternate light and darkness that shot athwart his path from the nearly level orb through the great pines. As they flitted, phantom-like, by him, now gliding past, now hovering round him, and striking him with their far-reaching arms of silver and ebony, he found it difficult to avoid the impression that he was journeying through a haunted forest, where every tree enclosed a human life, and moved its limbs in supplication or menace as he passed. When he approached the edge of the clearing the impression that human figures were moving near him became so strong that he several times stopped and peered into the chequered gloom; but, detecting nothing, he went on, and turning his mule into the *corral*, entered the house. All there was still; but the excitement of the day was yet too fresh for him to think of sleep; so he opened a window and stepped into the verandah, and leant over the railing as he smoked a cigarette.

With a man of Edmund Noel's temperament, such a scene as he then surveyed could not but evoke the deepest feelings

The darkness was intense. How he avoided the trees which thickly thronged his path he knew not; but he sped with swift and noiseless steps, and no sound escaped his lips. Presently a sudden gleam of a lantern close before him revealed that for which he sought. No question was needed for explanation. He was alone; the assailants were many; and the victim was one. Still voiceless as death, for he knew the supreme value of mystery in an encounter in the midnight forest, and sudden as the stroke of the Destroying Angel, his uplifted hand, armed with its tremendous weapon, fell with rapid blows upon the ruffian heads around him. At each descent of his arm a man fell, stunned or dead. And, as if in a moment, he heard the steps of some in rapid flight, while none remained erect to offer resistance, or supply food for his vengeance. Presently, as he looked around in search of more foes, his foot caught in a rope which nearly tripped him up, and a groan came as from some one attached to one end. Following it with his hands, for his abnormal power of vision had vanished with the excitement that produced it, he found it to be a lasso, the loop of which was drawn tight around the body of James Maynard, binding his arms to his side.

Loosening this, Noel raised him up, and found that he had been dragged along the ground until almost totally insensible. Unless he recovered it was hopeless for Noel to attempt to get him home, and he could not leave him there, prostrate, among foes, who might rise or return and assail him at any moment, while he went for aid.

So Noel sat down beside his friend, and endeavoured to restore him to consciousness. Presently James murmured something in Spanish. Then he pronounced the words 'Margaret' and 'love.' Then, as if roused by his own voice, he gave a start, and said—

'What is this? Where am I? Who is here?'

'I am with you,' said Noel, cheerfully. 'You have had an accident, and been a little stunned. As soon as you feel better you shall take my arm up the hill.'

The sound of Noel's voice served to accelerate James's return to life and recollection.

'How came you here with me?' he asked, suspiciously.

'Say rather how came you to be out in the woods, when I thought that, like a steady married man, you were safe in bed?'

Here Noel's ear caught a sound as of a slight movement.

'Have you got your knife with you?' he asked of Maynard.

'I always have it. What do you want it for?'

'Give it me, quick. I want to make something here fast before we go home.'

Giving it to him with a slow mechanical movement, as if yet hardly conscious of what he was about, Maynard kept his eyes fastened curiously upon Noel as he felt about on the ground, and cut the lasso into pieces, and then, moving along on hands and knees, seemed to be feeling for something, and then to be binding something, first in one spot and then in another. Only one of the bandits uttered any sound as he was being bound, so well had Noel wielded his arm. Maynard heard it, and exclaimed sharply,

'What's that? Who is speaking to you?'

'All right. You shall know all about it to-morrow,' said Noel, rejoining him. 'Can you manage to get up now and come home?'

Rejecting his offer of aid, Maynard tried to raise himself, but failed, and fell back again.

'No. I am best here for the present. Don't you stay for me. I shall be home as soon—as soon as I care to be.'

There was a surliness in his tone which Noel attributed to his not being quite himself yet; so he took him by the arm, and said encouragingly,

'Now, try again.'

With an effort, Maynard stood up, supporting himself by Noel's arm.

'That's well; now try a few steps.'

These were with difficulty accomplished, but his power seemed to be returning. When about half-way home, Maynard felt as if he really could not go any farther. Perceiving that his mind had now become clear, Noel thought he might now enlighten and stimulate him at the same time. So he said,

'Take a few minutes' rest, and then we will go on again. It is worth the effort, if only in an economical point of view.'

James looked wonderingly at him.

'I mean that it will cost less than having to be ransomed by a round sum out of the coffers of the *Real*.'

'What! have I been nearly carried off?' he cried, suddenly regaining his vigour.

'Very nearly indeed, I suspect,' said Noel; 'and I don't consider you are safe now until you get home.'

'But how did you—— ?'

'I will tell you all about that in the morning. Now, lean on my arm as heavily as you can, and we shall soon be home.'

Nothing more was said during the long effort of reaching the house. It was all dark, as Noel had left it. Clearly no one had been alarmed there. Maynard sat down for a few minutes on the steps of the verandah before entering. Noel asked if he should call any one.

'No, no,' said James, hastily. 'I will go into your room and sleep there to-night, if you don't mind taking the hammock or a sofa.'

'Very good; but won't Margaret be alarmed when she wakes up and misses you?'

'Oh no, she is used to——to my ways. I often go out for a walk at night.'

He said this somewhat sheepishly, Noel thought.

Helping him into his own room, Noel saw him to bed, having first ascertained that there were no injuries beyond a few scratches and bruises; and then, taking his pistols and a light, he went round to the stables in the rear of the house and called up the men. He felt so indifferent to the fate of the brigands whom he had punished so severely, that his first intention had been to go to bed leaving any steps respecting them until the morning. But, acting on second thoughts, he roused the servants and told them what had occurred, and in a little while a party was on its way with mules and cords and lights, to the scene of the encounter. On hunting about they found five bodies extended on the ground. Two appeared to be dead; the others were only insensible. Noel had bound only four, having missed one in the darkness. He could not tell whether any had recovered and gone away, but fancied from the number of knock-down blows he had administered, that several must have done so.

Amid a vast amount of chattering and wonderment on the part of the servants, the marauders were secured and placed on the mules, each with a man riding behind to hold him up; and carried down to the *hacienda*, and locked up for the night. Those that were stunned regained their senses during the ride, and Noel could not help being amused by the curious bewilderment of both captors and captured, at the character of the strange procession, and the mystery of the whole business. For he did not reveal to them the secret of the slung-shot, but had

merely said that he had knocked them down, leaving it to be supposed that his fist was the weapon with which he had cracked all those skulls.

And so the living prisoners plied their supporters with questions which they could not answer; and the dead ones swayed from side to side in silence, at each step taken by the mules as they picked their way down the hill.

CHAPTER XV.

As Noel re-entered the house, he was met by Margaret, still dressed as she had been for the *fête*, although the night was now far advanced. With a hurried step, and anxious questioning face, she advanced to meet him.

'He is all right,' said Noel, divining her thought; and taking her by the hand, and leading her towards the room where Maynard was, he inquired,—

'How came he to be out in the forest so late?'

'Ah, you don't know. I never told any one of our real life. I wished to make him always appear to others as excellent as he really is,—but—but you must know now that he sometimes has fits of anger and rage with me, for what he deems my coldness and indifference, when he declares that he will separate from me altogether, as he does now for months and months at a time, saying that I am no real wife to him, and only mechanical mother of his children. And then he rushes away, and stays all night in the forest; and to-night he was angry with me for a discovery that he said he had made;—he said I had deceived him, and that he knows now that I can love.' And here her face lit up with a sad, wan, yet angelic smile, that made Noel vow to himself, that he would never seek or do aught that might bring one shade of self-reproach to darken it.

'But what has happened?' she continued; 'and how came you up so late? I fell asleep as I am, and I had such a dreadful dream. I thought that he would have been killed, and you saved him——'

'You really dreamt that?'

'Yes; and my dreams are so often like reality, that I awake in fright——'

'Well, perhaps it is as well that you should remain *incognito*, and it may conduce to our safety in future that we should be supposed to be under the protection of some invincible demon of darkness. The natives are quite superstitious enough to think so. Did they hear you speak sufficiently to guess your extraction or identity?'

Noel replied, laughing, that as he never talked about a thing when he had made up his mind to do it, it was most probable that he had maintained his usual reserve, and not uttered a word; and then they sat down to breakfast.

When Maynard and the *administrador* had taken their departure, Noel said to Margaret,—

'There is one point on which I have been wishing to ask you some questions. How has James been affected by the circumstances attending his father's death? I mean in his character generally?'

'Since our marriage he has never alluded to him. And I do not like to think why, for I fear that it is because the sacrifice has not brought him the happiness he looked for.'

What sacrifice?'

'You must know that I, though always admiring James's talent, and grateful for the kindness he had always shown me, was averse to marrying him. I shrank from coming near him in that way; why, I have only lately learnt. But when I saw him in trouble and distress, and knew that he had always cared for me, and then that Lord Littmass died rather than be an obstacle to his son's happiness, I felt it would be wicked and ungrateful of me to bring ruin to the lives of the two to whom I owed everything; for I saw that James would never be himself, or do anything in the world, unless he had his way. And then, I was a burden to my aunt and cousin; and so I thought that, after all, it was only myself that was at stake, and it seemed to me that my own happiness ought to be a small matter to me where so much and so many were concerned. But I see now that I was wrong, and James has often told me so.'

'He has reproached you for marrying him!'

'Yes, because I knew I did not love him as he wished and deserved to be loved. Oh, but he is right, and many and many a time have Lord Littmass's words come back to me, as a warning from a saint and a prophet.'

'A somewhat new view of Lord Littmass,' thought Noel, with an inward smile, but he did not say so, being determined

to leave unshaken any illusion whose loss would cause her distress. So he asked,—

'Can you tell me the words, and the occasion of them?'

'Yes. He perceived the dis-sympathy between us, and in cautioning me against a marriage without sympathy, he said, with an emphasis which startled me, "To marry out of compassion one that is unloved, is to court misery for three. It is to defraud the one only possible love that Providence is keeping in reserve." His words had no meaning for me then. I forgot them all the time when I ought most to have remembered them. And now I require not only James's forgiveness, but yours. How could I be so blind!'

'We had not met then,' remarked Edmund, purposely ignoring her real meaning.

'But I felt that he was not for me, and I ought to have trusted my faith, and believed that the yearnings of my soul would find their due fulfilment in time—or beyond it!'

'Had you been left to yourself you might have done so; but with so energetic and practical a personage as Sophia Bevan beside you, it seems to me impossible for you to have escaped being influenced as you were.'

'How well you comprehend her!' exclaimed Margaret.

'I was to blame even more than she was for the perversity of our destinies,' returned Noel. 'You and James are the least responsible of the four. Duty has done it all! Even that Duty which Sophia delights in preaching up as consisting in going against the grain; that is, in simply violating one's own nature.'

'But how are you implicated?'

'James loved much, and therefore is to be forgiven. There was no question of duty with him. He obeyed the promptings of his nature. You acted from pity, a feeling that might have grown into love, had he been a skilful and patient husbandman.'

Here Margaret shook her head doubtingly. Noel went on,—

'Placed as you were, the pressure was irresistible. I am afraid I cannot blame you. But Sophia and I ought to have known better, for we were free.'

'I do not understand it in the least,' interposed Margaret.

'Neither did I, until too late. I gathered from some hints let fall by my uncle, that Lord Littmass wished us to meet, in the hope that I might at least prove a barrier to James's suit.

fully repelled it as an encroachment upon her proper independence. I don't know whether her preference went so far, but at any rate it became a duty with her to quench her own feeling, and even to influence you in his favour.'

'Oh, how cruel,' murmured Margaret.

'The duty that enjoins self-sacrifice for the sake of self-sacrifice ever is cruel,' rejoined Edmund. 'It shows, too, the wrongfulness of all interference in the deeper matters of the heart. Had no attempt been made by either Lord Littmass or Sophia Bevan, to bring us together, we should certainly have met, and that probably before his death. Do you feel certain that we should have had the same feelings then?'

'Why not?'

'It may have been the effect of your life with James to produce a certain manner, expression, or tone in you, that you would not otherwise have had. Who knows how much you owe to the discipline of your life, to make you what you are to me? Again, had I met you while we were both free, I might have fallen so headlong in love as to shock and repel you by my very ardour. The very anxiety I should have shown to win your regard, might have distorted all my words and actions, and made me seem different in your eyes. I can easily imagine your being more impressed by the self-control of one who, finding you already placed beyond his reach, seemed to you to exhibit a certain amount of moral power in repressing his feelings, than by the irrepressible eagerness of a lover who put his whole life upon the chance of winning you.'

At all these suppositions, Margaret only shook her head doubtingly, as if implying that she could not conceive of him as under any circumstances manifesting such lack of the grace that wins, as to fail to attract her.

'But I was going to ask,' he continued, 'what you meant by saying that Lord Littmass died rather than be an obstacle to his son's happiness.'

'James told me at Linnwood that Lord Littmass felt his pride to be so involved in the question of our marriage, that the mere discussion of it brought on a spasm of the heart; and that if I continued obdurate, I should be the destroyer of his life also. I did not require a full explanation of the occurrence. I trusted to him implicitly, and allowed his dark hints to have weight with me. The upshot of them was unmistakable; that the father died in order to set the son free to marry me. I

may tell you what I have scarcely dared to allow myself to suspect. James sometimes turns things ingeniously to his own purposes. He has a love of paradox that misleads him as to the real nature of facts where his feelings are concerned, and forces him to conclusions opposite to the plain and natural ones. I was miserable at first to think that I had, wittingly or not, been the cause of my guardian's death. But since my marriage, I have sometimes doubted whether I could altogether trust James's account. Do you know anything?'

'That James loved you, and would have done almost anything to win you, there can be no doubt,' returned Noel; 'but you were attached, or at least grateful, to Lord Littmass, and I should be sorry to suggest anything that might diminish your faith in him. Besides, I might be mistaken. I was so much away from England at the time, that the impressions I formed from the little I heard, may have been ill-founded. I know too well the pain of having to pull any one in whom I have believed and trusted, down from the moral pedestal on which I have placed him. Ah, Margaret, what an incitement to always live up to the high level of your esteem is such a love as yours. It seems to me as if I could never dare to do anything from a lower range of motives, for fear of forfeiting your affection.'

'You would never have gained it, had it been the only controlling motive of your character,' she replied, with a sigh. And then they separated and retired to their respective rooms, Margaret rejoicing in having gained a confidant so tender and true; and Noel indignant with Maynard for the deception he had practised in respect of his father's death, and wishing he could put Margaret's life and his own back for four years. He also wondered whether James knew that Lord Littmass had robbed his ward of her portion, and left her penniless; and then it occurred to him that it might have been James's knowledge of this fact that determined him to marry her at all hazards, by way of making reparation for the wrong she had sustained at his father's hands. And as he thought of James's conduct from this point of view, and the return by which it had been met, he rejoiced to think still that his friend was noble of nature, and commiserated the bitter disappointment that had befallen his hopes of happiness. And then, for the first time in his life, Noel wondered whether man is, even in the full flush of his own strong will, an independent being; or whether he is but the sport of a fate that mocks his best laid plans with

failure, and converts his noblest actions into instruments for his torture.

To recognise a power guiding events, and controlling the individual for his own benefit, and making destiny the legitimate offspring of character, involved a philosophy only attainable through an experience transcending that of Edmund Noel at this time.

CHAPTER XVII.

MAYNARD returned from the *hacienda* about midday, bringing the *padre* with him.

'It is useless to talk to him,' said the latter, shrugging his shoulders, and quaintly mixing Spanish and English, to Noel, who met them on their entrance. 'Instead of sending the *piccarones* to be locked up in the *Alhondiga* at Guanaxuato, he has made them dig a grave and bury their *camarádas muértas*, given them a talking to, and let them carry off their broken heads to nurse at leisure. *Santa Vergen!* I have often heard of the *pugilista Inglés* before, but I never thought an Englishman's fist could crack a Mexican's skull.'

At this moment Margaret, hearing their arrival, came from her room, and looked anxiously at James. He was grave, and seemed disinclined to be communicative. Telling Margaret to entertain the *padre*, he asked Noel to accompany him to his study.

'You expressed a wish,' he said, as they seated themselves in the little room, 'to accompany my next *conductá* to Tampico. I have determined to despatch it at once. I do not advise you to go, and I shall be sorry to lose you; but if you prefer going, your arrangements ought to be made to-day.'

'When does it start?'

'At midday to-morrow, and encamps the first night a little beyond Dolóres, the village whence we take our name. You need not start so early as that. The train travels slowly, and you can easily overtake it. You will have a roughish time, but it is the best season for travelling, and your absence, after last night's business, will not be without its advantages. If you do

go through to the port, I shall not be surprised at the sight of the steamer making you change your mind about coming back to us. At any rate, if you return, you will find us living in the *hacienda*.'

If one thing seemed more impossible than another to Noel at that time, it was the idea of his leaving Mexico while Margaret was in it. It was, however, very satisfactory to him to find that Maynard had no thought of the kind.

'My baggage is all at Vera Cruz,' he answered; 'and I could hardly make the voyage home without it. No, I shall certainly come back, and have another look at you, and then take Mexico city on my next journey. Besides, I have done nothing of what I came here to do, and if there is any risk impending, I cannot return and tell my uncle that I left you to face it alone.'

'So far as that is concerned,' said Maynard, 'it is only part of my business to take whatever may come. With you it is different.'

'You may be quite sure that neither my uncle nor I,' returned Noel, 'will consent to your remaining in this country when there is any real danger. If a time comes when no precaution will ensure safety in working the mine, you must shut it up, and leave it in charge of an agent, and come away until things become settled again.'

'It will take a good deal to drive me from my post,' answered Maynard. 'And I intend to stick to it, and keep things going in one way or another, so that even if I cannot actually extract or ship any metal, I shall still be in a better position for doing so when the country is open again.'

It struck Noel that he spoke as if he had some ground of confidence, which he was averse to revealing; but wishing to avoid any allusion to the question of sending Margaret and the children home, for he did not feel prepared to give a dispassionate opinion thereon, Noel hastened to change the subject, and so inquired what Maynard had been doing at the *hacienda*.

'Much as the *padre* told you. I found that the *ladrones* were of the poorest class of *péons*, with the smallest drop of Spanish blood in them, and so I gave vent to the sympathy which I have with the aboriginal inhabitants, and, after some magisterial observations, set them free. The poor fellows, who really seemed to be driven by famine into turning an honest penny as best they could, went off far better disposed towards me than

they would be likely to be after a course of punishment. A policy of leniency is rare in this country, where nature, man, and circumstance are alike volcanic; and I shall not be surprised to find it prove the best. I have never yet told you all my real position in Mexico, and the reasons I have for believing that I shall not be seriously molested, except under a complete capsize of affairs.'

'No; but ought we not to be rejoining the *señora* and *padre?*'

'Oh no, the poor old fellow has no greater treat than a good chat with Margaret, and a game with the children. We are not wanted. He knows but a small portion of what I am going to tell you. Of the three principal parties in the Mexican States, the Spanish, the aboriginal, and the mixed, or *mestizas*, his sympathies are with the latter. The *curas* of this part of the country have always been both ardent patriots and ardent Catholics, even to inciting insurrections and heading them in person in the field, whenever they considered the interests of the Church in danger. The most famous of these clerical warriors belonged to this very neighbourhood. There was an idea that the government imposed upon Mexico by Napoleon, in 1810, intended betraying the country to England and heresy; and Hidalgo, the *padre* of Dolóres, raised an immense force to resist it, took Guanaxuato by storm, and after several battles was himself captured and shot. Everybody is shot in Mexico. It is the way of the country. Well, my *padre* goes so far as to refuse his sympathies to the exclusive Spanish party, which is confined almost entirely to the capital and large towns, but he does not know that I go beyond him, and restrict mine to the aborigines, and those who share their blood, to the exclusion of all influence from Rome, Spain, or any other foreign source. The system followed by the Spaniards in Mexico, practically exceeds in its severity towards the natives any that ever was practised by ourselves in India, Ireland, or elsewhere. For, without denying them the legal right of owning the soil, they have yet reduced them for the most part to a state of serfdom, and made them dependent on such charity or work as they can obtain from the race of their conquerors. The hopes of all these, who constitute the millions in these States, rest upon the President, Juarez, who is a pure-blooded Indian, and claims the soil for its natural owners. At present he has made but little way toward the redemption of his countrymen. Holding his position by Spanish aid, he is com-

pelled to cloak his ultimate designs, and proceed step by step. He is shrewd enough to see that there is little hope for the emancipation of his people, so long as they are under a foreign spiritual domination, and incapacitated from owning the land. All his depredations upon Church property,—and the priests call him the arch-destroyer—have been prompted as much by this motive as by the pressing needs of the State. If foreign residents have sometimes fared badly under his government, it is solely because he is unable to control effectively the Spanish-blooded agents whom he is forced to employ. If he reveals himself too soon, he will be deposed and shot; but if once he can become sufficiently independent of them to come out in his real character, he will have the enthusiastic support of the vast mass of the population. I discovered a good deal of all this on my first visit to Mexico; and, on my second, the matter seemed to me to have so important a bearing on the safety of the property here, that I contrived to get intimate enough with the President to let him see that my sympathies are with his race as against the conquerors: and he has assured me of his special protection against the forced loans which others are sometimes called on to pay. Remember that I am telling you all this in strict confidence. Not another soul must know it. It is as much in pursuance of my friendship with Juarez, as from any other motive, that I have treated my assailants of last night so gently. When you go to the capital, I will, if you like, give you an introduction to him. You have only to represent yourself as an admiring student of aboriginal antiquities, and a believer in the direct derivation of the old religion of Mexico from the earliest worships of Asia, which we have so often discussed together, to find ready access to his heart. I told him a good deal on the subject that he was delighted with, and I have heard that he sometimes banters the Archbishop about getting his rites at second-hand. The Spaniards are here as conquerors; despisers and supplanters of everything really Mexican. Any good they might have done by bringing the civilisation of Europe with them has been far overbalanced by the arrogance and contempt, the cruelty and rapacity, the crushing servitude of soul and body, which they have imposed upon the subject race.'

'But I thought,' said Noel, 'that the constitution of 1824 was a vast step in the direction of liberty for them.'

'So it was. Without it an Indian could never have been President; but, practically, it left the *péons* in hopeless bondage

and entirely at the mercy of the *hacendéros*. No government will be successful or stable that fails to act rightly by the labouring race. The reason why I anticipate little good from the Intervention is just this. If it does not use compulsion, it will have no attention paid to it, beyond an increase of the feeling against foreigners. And if it attempt to establish a government by force, it will make the mistake of treating Mexico as Spanish, and so fail to establish itself upon the only firm basis which the country affords,—the affections and interests of the peasantry. There's the dinner bell.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

In the afternoon Maynard returned to the *hacienda* to superintend the packing of the silver for its conveyance to the coast, and Noel busied himself in his preparations for his journey. Margaret sat with her children amid her varied tasks, but was absorbed in her reveries, and her hands remained idle. On Noel's going into the room she said, with an attempt at firmness in her voice,—

'You will let me help you, if I can be of any use.'

'Thanks,' he said, cheerfully. 'I shall take but little with me, and will commit the rest of my belongings to your special charge until my return. I suppose a fortnight or three weeks will bring me back.'

'If you do not change your mind when you reach the sea.'

'Ah, Margaret! Does change seem so easy to you?'

'Men are so different from us. At least, so I have read.'

'Was that the moral of Aslauga's Knight? Do you know that though I can understand a formal college don giving a woman such a story to read with the idea of converting her into loving him, I gave James credit for more penetration. Why, its whole moral is in favour of spiritual ecstasy, as against a human love.'

'So I thought, until—until we met; and then it seemed to shift its meaning; and suggested to me how very poor a comfort the visionary Aslauga must have been to Frode, compared to that which Hildegard was to Edwald.'

go and finish his packing, as she wished to recover herself before any one should come in. And the self-mastery which enabled him to obey her and to leave her, she reckoned as an excellency in him.

CHAPTER XIX.

Maynard, after returning from his work, was in unusually high spirits the whole evening; talking incessantly, scarcely caring to be answered, and not in the least heeding the dreamy absent air that had come over Margaret and Noel.

'It is always so when he is sending off a *conductá*,' she said to Edmund, on James leaving the room for a short time. 'I don't take any notice of it to him, because I like him to exercise his moods unconsciously. But I have observed of late that he has become more thoughtful and anxious each quarter as the time for making a shipment has approached, and that it has seemed as if a weight was off his mind directly it is despatched.'

'I suppose, then, that it is under the influence of his anxious moods that he has written the letters which have made my uncle fear the responsibility was weighing upon him. I have never named this to you, because I hoped to have ascertained the truth for myself. But so far as I can judge, he has not done himself justice in his letters home.'

'I am vexed to hear that he has produced such an impression on Mr Tresham,' said Margaret; 'but I feel sure that it is only with a view to carrying out his fixed idea of sending me home with the children, and staying in Mexico himself.'

Here Maynard returned and asked Margaret to give them some music. Finding what she played somewhat doleful for his mood, he stopped her and would have no more. Then he told Noel it was a pity that he would have no time for sketching, as there were some fine views on the road to Tampico. And so the contagion of his activity gradually drew both Noel and Margaret from their abstraction, as he kept up a continuous conversation by remarks that seemed to flow from a source of inexhaustible knowledge, wisdom, and wit.

'And I suppose,' he said to Noel, 'that in case you change

your mind and go on home instead of returning here, the next thing we shall hear of you will be through some book in which we shall find life-like portraits of ourselves.'

'Ah, that is always my difficulty,' returned Noel. 'I have seen plenty that is worth writing about, but people have always been so kind that I shrank from putting them into a book.'

'Why so? Nothing pays like personalities.'

'Besides, I do not care for mere travels, or adventures, as such. I want them to illustrate character, and indicate opinion and growth. Without such human interest a book of travels is to me but a guide-book, very useful in its way, but not such as I care to compile.'

'You advocate individuality in literature, if not in conduct,' said James, referring to their previous conversation.

'I consider that the exercise of any faculty must be governed in its limitations by consideration for others, whether it be in the domain of conduct or of letters. Thus, I can imagine a man so dominated by an idea which he believes to belong to himself alone, as to devote his life to elaborating it in a book, and yet withholding it from publication as at least premature. People would find it painful or unintelligible.'

'I see,' said Maynard. 'You consult people's feelings, while I consider the interests of humanity. I prefer sacrificing the individual to the race, rather than the race to the individual. It is this consideration for the weak brother that has exalted ignorance and stupidity into the ruling power of society. Science has to hold its tongue because the majority are under the dominion of their prejudices and fancies. And Art has to subordinate truth to respectability, passion to propriety.'

'Have you thought of any subject on which to write?' asked Margaret of Edmund.

'I have thought of several, but fixed on none. Every subject of real importance assumes such portentous dimensions as soon as one approaches it. One was suggested to me years ago in a talk with James; and has been working in my brain ever since. But I distrust my ability to carry out my scheme to my satisfaction.'

'Scientific or artistic?' asked James.

'A combination of both.'

'Founded on history, adventure, or character?'

'Each and all. A romance, in short, of peculiar construction.'

'There is no romance equal to that of people's own lives. Do you mean to have a plot in it?'

'Scarcely what is ordinarily called a plot; yet a decided plot to my mind, for it involves the development of character and growth of ideas amid the conflicting elements of man's nature and history. I want to represent Humanity as a continuous Being, starting from primitive savagery, and at length, by the contact of his character with the external world, with his struggles and his blunders as stepping-stones, or rather as *rungs* in the ladder of his progress, attaining the highest development of which his nature is capable, yet never abandoning that nature.'

'The general epitomised in the individual,' observed Maynard. 'Why, it is the Bible of all Humanity that you are contemplating.'

'I want also to show how from the patent and rudimentary facts of existence man deduces the most abstruse, and detects the basis of his spiritual being even in the gross elements of his physical.'

'You have not forgotten our Stonehenge researches, I see.'

'You perceive my meaning, then. I am glad of that, for I was so far from being intelligible to myself, that I scarcely expected to become intelligible to you.'

'It will want some management to treat the subject at once scientifically, artistically, and popularly,' said James. 'Readers, some one has said, may be generally divided into two classes, the historical and the hysterical; those who are not afraid to go into the real facts; and those who are so contented with certain ideas suggested by a selection from the facts, as to shrink from all others.'

'My scheme,' said Noel, 'involves a use of the old method whereby philosophers spoke with one meaning for the initiated among their pupils, and another for the novices. I believe it possible to write a romance containing both esoteric and exoteric significations, each alike interesting and instructive to those to whom it is addressed, and unintelligible to those by whom it is not intended to be understood.'

'Such a phenomenon may be possible,' observed Maynard, 'because life is possible, and it is life in its heights and depths, its mysteries and its revelations, that you want to transfer to your pages. But the more successful you are, the more you must expect to incur the opprobrium which life has incurred,

and to accept your share of the total depravity which so many folks delight to attribute to man. You may seek to amuse people, if you will, without exciting reprobation. But if, leaving the domain of mere science or mere amusement, your object be really to enlighten, there will be plenty to point out to the world that its holiest, its dearest, or its usefullest, sentiments are being trampled on, and you will find yourself and your art consigned to perdition by the inevitable "weak brothers" who do not stop to consider whether they are capable of understanding you aright; or who care far less whether you have truth on your side, than whether you agree with them. You should determine, before you begin to write, at what kind of success you aim, or you may be sadly disappointed at the result. If at a commercial success, that is, to be read by the tens of thousands, you must be content with providing milk for babes, so far as any real thought is concerned. If at a literary or philosophical success, that is, to be praised on high grounds by high-class reviews, you must be content with a small audience. The way to look at the matter is this. Everybody is born. Most live through infancy to childhood. Many through childhood to manhood. Several to old age. A very few to extreme age. The size of your audience depends on which of these classes you address: whether the million children; the thousand adults; the score of aged. The genius is rare, if not impossible, that can attract all. But there are other limitations with us. In literature, as the British world is at present constituted, you cannot at the same time serve God and Mammon. Real knowledge on the deepest of all subjects is tabooed. Your scheme, as I understand it, goes to the very root of things.'

'It does indeed,' said Edmund, with a slight laugh. 'I must make the foundation the lowest, in order to be able to rear on it the loftiest superstructure.'

'Foundations should be concealed, you know.'

'True, but they must be there, and traceable. I aim at showing the divine shining through the human, the moral and spiritual through the animal, in every phase of man; taking his lower physical nature as representative to him of creative power, and his higher moral nature as representative of divine character; yet not merely representative but essentially identical. But it is a subject one may pass one's life in meditating on, and never write at all.'

'There is yet another limitation to your audience,' said

Maynard, 'in the absurd way we bring up our women. An author may gain the attention and even excite the enthusiasm of every intelligent man in the country, and yet the very mention of him be frowned down in society, because he surpasses the limits allowed to female education or comprehension. Woman, with her emotional nature morbidly stimulated by a vicious education of repression and concealment, keeps the world back in the regions of superstition. A man, to spare her feelings, conceals and arrests his own progress. And so humanity lingers on its road, as Adam shared the apple, that woman may not be left behind. You will not be shocked at what I am going to say, Margaret, for you are the veriest pagan. It is in this sense that the phrases, "Woman is the mother of God," and "Ignorance is the mother of Devotion," are identical in meaning. For the devotion that proceeds from ignorance is superstition; and the God that ignorant superstitious woman produces in her imagination, is no God and Father, recognisable in His works —the facts of nature, and adorable by the educated intellect of man. It is little wonder that so many of our youth in the passage between the feminine imaginations that have guided their childhood and the actualities of manhood, become hopelessly wrecked and lost for want of sounder knowledge of their own natures and the world's meaning. I hope that whatever work you do, you who need not waste yourself in working for popularity and pay, it will include in its aim the intellectual emancipation of women as well as of men. It will avail little to help man to take a step forward, if he is thereby separated still farther from his natural complement, woman. Indeed, the very essence of your idea involves the coincidence of the sexes, and the natural relations between them, as the basis and sustenance of all higher existence. There are symptoms of the dawning of an era different from any that has yet occurred. Hitherto man has governed the world by himself, and a marvellous mess he has made of it. Some day he will let woman help him. I don't mean by woman the aggregate of the accomplished dolls who are taught to consider life a success when they have secured the modern *arma virumque*, settlements and a man, all to themselves; or even of those who think to obtain happiness in the next world by practising the selfishness of the devotee in this; but woman with her finer perceptions and sympathies developed and disciplined by an education that shall teach her the real meaning and principles of human association. With women

more as they might be, there would come such an improvement in men that the very face of the world would be changed. However, humanity is very young yet. The very immensity of what there is to be done and known is the best indication that the time and the ability will not be wanting. The end cannot be yet, unless Nature is so far a failure as to be incapable of comprehending and fulfilling itself.'

CHAPTER XX.

THE morning of the despatch of a *conductá* from *El Real de Dolóres* was always a busy one. The packing of the mules with the small but heavy boxes filled with bars of silver, made a scene of huge noise and bustle under the manipulation of the native *muleteros*. The operation was performed under the personal supervision of Maynard, who had gone down early to the *hacienda* accompanied by Noel and Margaret, it being one of her days for her visits of benevolence to the families of the miners whose dwellings clustered around the works.

It was a curious and a stirring scene, and gave Noel a better idea than he before had of the resources and expenditure of the mine, and of the condition of the country. The sight of the numerous escort armed and accoutred for the journey, combined with the reminiscences of the last thirty-six hours, enabled him vividly to realise the fact that the post which Maynard held was actually in an enemy's country, so far as it was necessary for every one to protect himself, and he learnt to admire the courage and judgment manifested in the conduct of the enterprise.

It had been arranged that the train should start about noon, and that Noel should follow it some hours later and join it in the evening at its first camping place. So, after it had set off with vast shouting of the mule-drivers, jingling of mule-bells, and discharging of fire-arms on part of the escort, Noel returned home with his friends to have some dinner and prepare to take his leave. Maynard remarked as they ascended the hill that the sky had a threatening look, and that the convoy would probably get a soaking the first night, but neither Margaret nor Noel heeded him or the sky, for they had been

exchanging glances of affection, and the thought of their coming separation weighed heavily on them both. Yet they had agreed that it was best to be parted for a while, in order that they might contemplate the position in which they were placed, at a distance from the spell of each other's presence.

The meal was a gloomy one for them both, despite the incessant talking of Maynard, who seemed to be doing his best to speed the parting guest, but who really was attached to Noel, and felt his departure much. He even expressed his wonder at Noel's going at all, and said it could only be accounted for by the supposition that Margaret had quarrelled with him and made the place unpleasant.

Meanwhile the threatening cloud had gathered thickly over the mountain. At length it was announced that Noel's mule was ready. James went out into the verandah and, looking at the sky, said that one might fancy by the darkness that it was nightfall. And so it was to Noel and Margaret, for it was the first separation that had ever caused them grief, and their very heartstrings seemed torn asunder by it.

Words were impossible to them. A silent clasp of the hands was all that they permitted themselves. The two men descended the steps together, but before Noel was fairly in his saddle, Maynard, as if struck by a sudden thought, flew back up to the spot where Margaret was standing. Noel turned his head towards her, and by the intense flash which at that instant darted from the overhanging cloud, beheld Maynard seize her wrist as in a vice, pull her violently round, and peer eagerly into her face which she turned upon him with a white and stony glare as of indignation and defiance, while from James came the words, rather hissed than spoken,—

'You never cry when *I* go away!'

At that instant the thunder pealed forth a sudden and deafening crash that caused Noel involuntarily to strike his spurs into his mule. The animal, a powerful and spirited beast, sprang forward, and presently they were buried in the heart of the forest. Maddened by the sight which he had beheld, and which seemed as if burnt by the lightning into his brain, Noel heeded not his path, or the flashes that darted around him, or the big drops that beat upon him, and drenched him through and through his *serápe* to the skin;—heeded not the night, or the strangeness of the country through which he was being borne, or the exclamations of those whom he at last encoun-

tered;—knew nothing, in fact, of the hours that he passed, wet and chilled and fevered,—until days afterwards, when he found himself in his own room in Maynard's house, awaking with a gentle sigh as from a deep sleep, and Margaret, his beloved Margaret, sitting by his bedside with wan and tearful face, holding his hand in hers, and watching him with the anxiety of a mother for her firstborn.

CHAPTER XXI.

THEN Margaret, perceiving by the moisture of his hand, and the drops that stood upon his forehead, that the fever had departed, and that Noel's life was no longer in danger, rose from her seat, and saying, 'You must have some food now,' left the room.

This was the moment for which she had watched, and was prepared. Summoning a trusty English servant, she bade him tend the invalid, who now, she said, had passed the dangerous crisis, and required some nourishment. Everything that could be needed was in readiness, for Margaret trusted in the saving power of her love, and could not believe that Edmund could be torn from her. And now, having done her part, and proved that love was stronger than death, she went to her own room and gave way to her long pent-up feelings in a flood of tears. These were followed by a silent prayer of thanksgiving; after which she arose and refreshed her face with water, and renewed her neglected toilet. Then she opened her door and listened, and having heard Edmund talking softly, but naturally, to his attendant, she closed it again, and opening a drawer, took out some sheets of paper, and sat down to read some lines which were written thereon. They were in her own handwriting; and yet, before returning them to their hiding-place, she kissed them fervently. After this she sat down and *reveried.*

Soon she heard Noel's door open, and some steps descending the stairs, and the well-known voice speaking feebly but cheerfully. Then she hastened into the sitting-room, and prepared the sofa for his reception.

'Now, tell me all about it,' he said, as soon as she had made

him perfectly comfortable by arranging the cushions under his head, and perfectly happy by impressing a timid kiss upon his brow in response to the imploring look wherewith he entreated such consolation.

They each had something to tell, for Margaret had to learn that it was the sight of James's strange behaviour at the moment of parting that had set Edmund's mind on the track where the fever had found him; and he had to learn how he had been taken ill, and how that his mule, which had made the journey before, had, of its own accord, followed the convoy, and taken him, soaking wet and in a state of delirium, to the encampment, whence he had been brought home next morning in a litter.

'Poor James!' said Margaret, after explaining all this. 'He was so ashamed of himself afterwards, and would have gone out for another night into the forest, rain and all, if I had allowed it.'

'And how did you prevent him?'

'When you were fairly gone, and the rain was coming down in torrents, I said that it seemed very inhospitable to let a guest leave us in such weather, and that we ought to have delayed your start. And then he said, as if struck with remorse for his neglect in letting you go, that I was to blame in caring so much about your going as to make him angry. I returned, that he was himself very sorry at your leaving us.

'"But I did not cry over it," he answered.

'"Neither did I, that I was aware of," I replied; "but that even if I had, it was only a woman's way of exhibiting a regret that a man might equally feel, and express differently."

'He seemed struck by this, and said nothing; and, being somewhat desperate, I added,—

'"James, you have often said that you wished I would fall in love with somebody, as I should then understand your feelings and know how you suffer; and that if it was some one who did not care for me in return, it would be so much the better."

'"Well?" he said.

'"Well. I wonder that it does not occur to you that such unreasonable conduct as you indulge in might have the very effect you pretend to wish. Now, I do not in the least believe that it would make you happier to see me miserable. But whatever your real feelings on the subject may be, I do trust, for your own sake, that their exhibition may be confined to

myself, and that I may still have credit for a husband who is a sane man."'

'And how is he now?' asked Noel.

'Oh, he has cared for you like a brother, and scolded me whenever he has seen me pass an hour away from your room. I did not give him many such occasions for scolding me, I can assure you,' she added, with a playful and affectionate look. 'You are really attached to him, I hope. Are you not?'

'He has only one fault in my eyes,' said Edmund; 'that of having married you.'

'Well, now I shall not let you talk any more,' she said, placing her hand on his wrist. 'Your pulse is going too fast again. Try and sleep a little. James will be in soon, and will be so pleased and surprised at the improvement. I am going to the nursery.'

CHAPTER XXII.

NOEL awoke from a most refreshing slumber just as Maynard entered the house. Margaret saw him coming, and went to meet him. Telling him the good news, and that the invalid was in the sitting-room, she returned to her own room, and left James to go in to him alone.

'You have found Margaret a good nurse, I hope?' was his remark, after congratulating him on his amendment. 'Don't exert yourself to answer me. I know it is her strong point. Poor child, she made a great mistake in ever marrying. It was a model Sister of Charity lost. She can do anything out of compassion. Of love she has not the slightest conception. But what a fright you have given us! I ought not to have let you start off just as that storm was breaking. Why did you not wait?'

'The fact is,' returned Noel, 'that my mule and I were so startled by the sudden crash of thunder that we went off without intending it. And having arranged to go, it was hardly worth while returning for a shower of rain.'

'Well, I suspect you have gained a loss, for the chances are

that, whenever any of us do return to England, it will be by that route.'

'Have you any news, then?'

'Only that the Allied Squadron will soon reach Mexico, and that a great deal will depend on the spirit in which it comes, and the spirit in which it is received. In no case, probably, will it be prudent to go South, as the forces will land at Vera Cruz, and are pretty sure to make for the capital.'

Here Margaret entered the room, and seeing Noel flushed with the conversation, she reminded him that he was still weak, and advised him to return to his room, which had now been made ready for him.

Maynard proffering his aid, Edmund, with some difficulty, regained his room, and lay down exhausted by the effort he had made; and only fell asleep after much meditation on the peculiarities of his friend's character, which presented him alternately in the light of a profound philosopher, a generous friend, and a jealous demon; and he wondered how he himself would have acted had Margaret not returned his love. But so much a necessity of their mutual natures did their love seem to him to be, that he was quite unable to imagine such a case as possible.

Next day confirmed the improvement, and Noel told Margaret of the limitation which James had placed to her perfections in saying she was only fit to be a nurse.

She smiled at this, and said that he had probably said it on purpose, to put Edmund on his guard against thinking too well of her; and added,—

'He said as much to me, and I expected something of the kind. Indeed, he threatened to tell you that I am not a woman at all, but quite unworthy of your esteem.'

'And all the time he idolises you himself!'

'Yes, unfortunately for me. Often and often have I longed for him to find some one else to be in love with. It would be such a relief to me.'

'It would have to be some one very different from you to manage his moods.'

'Yes, I know that I feel for him too much to treat them in the way that would be best. What he wants is some simple, good-humoured, unsensitive woman, who could give in to all his wishes without knowing she was giving in.'

'A fat, comfortable woman, who would laugh at his fancies

instead of suffering by them as you do; and be a sort of moral cushion to him.'

'Yes, he is one who requires repose in his domestic life. I only excite and irritate him.'

'Yet I dare say he would rather be irritated by you than comforted by another.'

'He says that when he sends me away he will never write to me or open a letter from me: for so only can he bear the separation.'

'One can think of the dead without longing. He would then have you be to him as one dead.'

'I often wish I were dead. I seem fated to minister to no one's happiness in this world; and yet I cannot help thinking that I have the capacity for it.'

'Oh, Margaret, what should I do without you? It is only your love that has made my happiness.'

'Ah, you think so now; but sometimes a clear vision comes to me in which I see you in your inmost soul regretting the waste of life and love upon one who can be so little to you; and even blaming me for my part in it. Oh, do not do that, for it would kill me to know it. God knows it is my most earnest desire ever to do the right, judged by His own highest rule. Yet life is so perplexing. I cannot help loving you. I do not feel that it is wrong to love you. Yet, somehow, it only brings misery. Even already it has brought this illness upon you. And I, who would hail an eternity of misery broken only by the smallest intervals of intercourse with you, however few, however far apart, but yet something to the memory and anticipation of which I could cling;—I have combined with the elements to chase you out of reason and well-nigh out of life.'

'To me it rather appears that, driven from Paradise by the demon of a fancied expediency, I wake, and find an angel sitting beside me with gentle, healing hand clasped lovingly in mine. Pray let us not anticipate regrets. The cause for them may never come. And if it should come, far happier shall we be if, like yonder couple,'—he glanced as he spoke towards an engraving of Scheffer's 'Francesca and Paolo,' which hung on the wall,—'we are to be in torture, yet ever together, whether in body or spirit.'

'Ah, that was such a favourite of James's once; but now he calls it absurd and unnatural. If you are not tired, I want your opinion on some lines I copied down once,' said Margaret,

rather hesitatingly, and producing a small folded packet of papers. 'But no, I must wait. Here is James coming back.' And she thrust the packet away into its hiding-place.

'All going on well?' cried Maynard, in a cheery voice, as he entered the room. 'I think I see my way to moving down to the *hacienda* without more delay. We can occupy some of the rooms vacated by the officers of the escort, and before they return our cottage will be ready. And, between ourselves, the absence of so large a portion of our force makes it advisable that no time be lost. So I propose to commence packing up at once what is to go down.'

Margaret and Noel exchanged a hasty look of dismay. They feared that, once lodged on the very scene of James's labours, there would be an end to the freedom of their communion. However, Noel only said,—

'Well, if I am deprived of the temptation to look out of the window, which exists up here, I may have some chance of getting on with my projected book.'

'Nothing so contagious as the example of other people working,' said Maynard. 'I look upon my machinery as the most moral and intellectual creature possible. Perpetually receiving from all sides, there is no selfish retention of the good things put into it. But on it goes, devouring, crushing, stamping, and grinding, mixing and separating, rejecting nothing as too hard for its digestion, until it finally turns out the pure stuff ready for the world's use. I never watch it at work without being reminded of a human intelligence, the processes are so completely identical; especially in the fact that so small a proportion of what is taken in by it has an appreciable value. It does not, like the anaconda, swallow its meal and then go to sleep over it; but sets to work at once, turning it over, and hammering at it, and squeezing it, and takes no rest until it has broken it to pieces and extracted the good out of it. Oh, I look for quite a revolution in you from the example of the mill. It will be a grand thing to have so substantial a reminiscence of Mexico as a manuscript ready for the publisher when you get home.'

And so James ran volubly on, and each exhibition of his wise, kindly nature made Edmund feel more keenly for the blighting of his hope in life, and the position that he himself occupied towards him. The worst of all pangs, indeed, Noel was spared. He felt that neither himself nor Margaret were, personally, to

blame. Circumstance, or Fate, had done it all; and, regretting that the choice of Destiny for so hard a trial should have fallen upon himself and his friends, he persistently set himself to see how, by dint of acting up to the highest standard of conduct which he, with the assistance of Margaret's pure and true spirit, could devise, he might convert to the best end what otherwise could bring only dire misfortune.

Maynard had come up early that day for the express purpose of devoting himself to Noel. The afternoon was passed in the forest, where, reclining under a noble cedar, Margaret's especial favourite, the whole family made a pleasant group until near sunset: the two men talking animatedly, the children playing around, and Margaret watching them, working and listening the while.

It is a fact worthy to be noted that Maynard's regard for Noel was greatly increased and confirmed by Margaret's approbation of his character. Despite all the perplexities and complications of the situation from which he was suffering, James never failed to have the firmest faith in the undeviating purity and truth of her instincts. Thus, for Margaret to place complete confidence in the character of any man was of itself enough to secure James's also. With this trust in the infallibility of her judgment and perceptions, he felt that had he himself been despised by her, he should have yielded to despair, and perhaps have courted self-destruction; for he owned to himself that under such reprobation his principles, religious or philosophic, would be powerless to restrain him. But he knew that she esteemed and honoured him, and that while failing to love him as he sought to be loved, she bitterly deplored her failure, and gave to him the best that was in her power. Thus, hope was not yet at an end; for, knowing her to be perfect in goodness, he still clung to the possibility of her yet learning to love him whom she owned to be good. He perceived that Noel was more to Margaret than any other had been. If she really had a sisterly attachment to their visitor, surely she would feel some gratitude to himself for any service that he might render him.

So Maynard set himself to work to serve Edmund by exciting his intellect to activity, and enabling him to work towards a definite purpose. In Maynard's eyes the man was but half an artist who was endowed with the sense of beauty, without the power and active impulse to create. The whole tendency of his character and philosophy was to scoff at Platonicism even in

art as neutral and emasculate. Contemplation without action was altogether foreign to his nature.

Among the favourite subjects of his satire it was a fancy of Maynard's to place first the world's trading classes, and he more ingeniously than ingenuously turned Napoleon's oft-quoted contempt for the British as shopkeepers, into contempt for the shopkeeper himself. Fairness was by no means always his aim in his social judgments; but, however paradoxical his opinions might be, he never failed to support them with plausibility and vivacity. Thus, on the present occasion, he broke forth:

'If one wants to know which is the most contemptible of human employments, one has only to look and see which gains the most money. If the reward be solely of earth, so also is the work. Let people have a lofty ideal of life and duty, and work with single aim towards it, and life becomes a struggle for bread. The artisan, the artist, the patriot, the saint, are ever poor and lean; while the barterer grows rich and fat. I had rather be a blacksmith, carpenter, or mason; or, as David said, "a door-keeper in the house of my God," and try to imitate my Maker by fashioning, creating, or producing something, if only thoughts, than pass life in exchange and barter. Yet even these follow without knowing it a deity after their own hearts; for the commercial mind has agreed to the tradesman view of an atonement for sin, and transferred the rule of three into the Godhead.'

In answer to this tirade Noel said,—

'If men allow their own special characters and pursuits to dictate their ideas of the abstract, it is difficult to see where we are to go for enlightenment. I want to see education so liberal as to raise men above such personal and local influences in their conception of the general.'

'The best way of ascertaining the kind of education which will do that,' said Maynard, 'is to look round and see where in the world the human mind is most cultivated, and yet least trammelled by limitations. Where, should you say?'

'In Germany, decidedly,' answered Noel, and Margaret assented.

'The most prominent national characteristic of the Germans,' continued Maynard, 'is their taste and capacity for music; and we may allow that it is this that has combined with their critical industry to make them the only people who are earnest without bigotry, and religious without dogma. With them no one opinion

is more respectable than another. Its probable truth is their only standard.'

'I see,' said Noel. 'Music, while weakening dogmatic belief, strengthens spiritual faith. It illumes the general, while veiling the particular. It quickens the spirit at the expense of the letter.'

'Precisely so; and in the growing development of the musical faculty in England I seo the best hope for the displacement of our insular sectarianism by a rational catholicity. Of course there are plenty of persons ready to encourage the revival of various superstitions under the cover of devotional music, so that our scientific education must be pushed on to keep us ahead of such folk. In such education, combined with music, I see our best hope for the future. Man is still very far from living by thinking only. He is yet in a stage in which his faith, or confidence, requires the quickening and modifying which come by hearing.'

'It never occurred to me that the apostle meant music,' said Noel, laughing.

'Didn't it?' asked James, with an air of surprise. 'He goes on to say as much: for never is the soul so open to those interior spiritual influences which, before and since the Psalmist, have been recognised as the "word of God," as when listening to the highest class of emotional music. Religion is a frame of mind, not a set of opinions. An aspiration and a prayer, not a sermon. Make the Scotch a musical people, and they will soon abandon their "Westminster Confession," and their "Greater and Lesser Catechisms." Ceasing to be theological, they will become religious.'

'I had no idea you were such a lover of music,' observed Noel. 'You never ran after it in England.'

'That was because I rarely got it to my liking. The last party I was at where there was music in the drawing-room, I remained below, and some one came and said, "You are fond of music. Why don't you go up-stairs?"—"Because I *am* fond of music," I said.'

'It was very rude of you,' said Margaret merrily.

'Yes, matrimony had not come then, to soften my manners. But, seriously, I really believe that the only agency whereby the world will ever be regenerated, must consist in the harmonious combination of science and art.

'Meaning thereby, I suppose, accurate thinking and well-regulated feeling,' observed Noel.

'By Science I mean that which relates to the intellect, and by Art that which relates to the emotions. They are as male and female to each other. Divorce them, and all goes awry. My line has generally lain in the former. Yours, I take it, is the latter. Thus,—don't take it amiss,—I would suggest that if ever such a remarkable occurrence should happen as that of a woman falling in love,' (this with a covert glance at Margaret,) 'and you happen to be the subject of her hallucination, what she will be attracted by will be, not the opposite of her own nature, that is, the masculine element in you, but rather the artistic, emotional, and feminine side of your character. Don't think, however, that by attributing to you the province of art as your speciality, rather than that of science, I am restricting you to a limited field of operations. The two cannot be so entirely separated as that. There must be a back-bone of science within every art-product. You have described to me the plan of your contemplated book. I understand it at least well enough to perceive that it is essentially an art-work, having a thoroughly scientific basis. But I should like to know for whom it is designed. You see, we scientific folk, addressing an audience of educated men, have no need to veil or decorate our facts and inferences in order to obtain a hearing. Our world has undergone an emancipation which yours is still awaiting. With those for whom you write, an idea depends for its reception very much upon the dress in which it is arrayed.'

'I really don't see,' replied Noel, 'that I have to do with such considerations. I write a book for general amusement or instruction, and the libraries circulate it. Those who like it read and recommend it. Those who don't may leave it alone.'

'That will apply to anything which resembles the ordinary run of books; but you aim, I imagine, at something not only original, but having a deep esoteric signification, involving a peculiar theory of human nature and human faith. What if the libraries decline to take it?'

'I cannot imagine such impertinence as a tradesman dictating to his customers what they shall or shall not read.'

'You may have, as I think I have already said, the greatest literary success, and yet be ignored by the public. The circulating library, as at present constituted, is a feminine and semi-clerical institution. The librarian is expected to send out only

such books as are considered "safe." Parents leave the selection in his hands; and through fear of making a mistake, and sending something that may stimulate thought, he prefers to exclude such a book altogether. I mention this merely to show you that by neglecting to pay some deference to our social debilities, you may fail to get an audience, and so fail to do any good to yourself or others.'

'As my impulse to write is not a commercial one,' said Noel, 'my aim will be to get as near as possible to my own ideal. I don't suppose that I am so eminently unhuman as to fail to find many who will sympathise with and appreciate my work in case I succeed in reaching pretty high. There are very many who, like myself, believe in natural facts, and like to see them artistically applied to the illustration of man's life and history. If I can please the better class of University students, for example, I shall have a tolerably large audience in addition to them. But I was going to say that, while I like what you said about music, I am not quite sure that I agree to your distinction between science and art. It is too much of a distinction, and involves the possibility of a divorce between what is not so much wedded, as eternally and essentially *one*. Call them if you will the masculine and feminine elements in nature, all the theologies, as you yourself have shown me, recognise the combination of those elements in the divine unity. I prefer calling Art the attempt to interpret Nature, and Science the attempt to use Nature. I look upon Creation as Representation: the manifestation of the Divine Idea. You said just now that you esteem the calling of the artisan who makes, as far above that of the trader who exchanges. Well, to me the term artist includes all makers, or manifesters of ideas. One uses colour as his medium of representation. Another employs sculpture or architecture to exhibit those beauties of form which the universe has revealed to his view. Another finds his best mode of expression in music. Others, again, employ prose or verse to delineate in the choicest language they can find the varied emotions of the human heart, and the different courses of conduct to which those emotions impel men. While another selects the pulpit as the stage from which he can most effectually dilate upon what he has perceived of the mysteries of our moral and spiritual being. Thus, all who use language, either spoken or written, are in their degree artists. But none, probably, can vie with the actor in the facilities he possesses for moving men's

minds. He appeals, not to one sense only, but to many senses at once. He combines all the resources of all other artists. The colours of the painter, the forms of the sculptor, the strains of the musician, are all at his command. He wields the words of poet, historian, and preacher. And to these he superadds tone and gesture, laughter and tears. He is a living picture; a speaking image; an acted sermon: teaching by visible example, as well as by uttered precept.'

'Most true,' said Maynard, 'and I only wish that painters and sculptors, authors and composers, actors and preachers, would learn to look upon themselves as artists in such a sense, and understand that their work is good only according to the height of their aim, the truthfulness of their representations, and the conscientiousness with which they give of their best. If people couldn't get the bad, they would have to put up with the good, and I dare say would come to like it, by practice.'

'Meaning that the bad is the natural, and the good the acquired, taste,' observed Margaret, shaking her head.

'Well,' said Maynard, qualifyingly, 'bad and good are only relative terms, like young and old. The world is so young yet that only a few people in it have learnt to appreciate the high art which is called goodness. But if such be your opinion of the drama,' he asked of Noel, 'why don't you write a play instead of a novel?'

'That must come later. The philosophical drama has yet to be invented. "Faust" and "Manfred" are rather poems. Besides, a play is a complex affair, requiring vast apparatus of stage and company for its exhibition. And so much depends upon the performers. I wish acting was one of the liberal professions, involving high education.'

'Well, a book wants printer, publisher, advertiser, and reviewer; and, perhaps, artist and engraver.'

'The former add nothing to the work, and with the last two I hope to dispense,' returned Edmund. 'However many men it may take to publish a book, its composition must be the work of but one, or all individuality is wanting. By getting another man to illustrate his book, the author confesses his inability to convey his ideas satisfactorily to others. In that case, it really takes two people to make the book, as the Manichæans pretended that it took two creators, a good and a bad one, to produce the world.'

'But if he draw them himself?'

'Even then he confesses, by the addition, that he is not a sufficient master of language to do without them; unless, indeed, his book is intended for children who do not understand language. A writer ought no more to require the aid of drawings to illustrate his meaning, than a painter to require a written description beneath his picture to explain the expression of the faces. Every work must tell its own tale.'

'It will be no argument with you,' said James, 'to say that the trade likes them. And if you aim at really high work, you are right to disregard trade-exigencies. Those belong to the province of the dealer. Trade has one object, art another. The artist who estimates his work by a trade-success, abandons his calling in doing so. When he says, "Will it pay?" instead of "Is it good and true?" he has no barrier between him and the abyss.'

'I suppose,' said Noel, 'he makes the public the judges, and regards the pay as the proof of their approbation.'

'That is, he has no ideal or standard of his own,' returned Maynard, 'and he is therefore no artist. Nature and genius may be burked at once, if everything is to be reduced to the level of a saleable commodity.'

'I always find myself haunted by the shade of plagiarism,' said Noel. 'The continuous man whom I want to draw has already been indicated by Hobbes, Pascal, and Comte; and you have suggested to me many ideas concerning his progress from his first rudimentary conceptions of creative power as exhibited in the forces of nature, through India, Egypt, Palestine, Greece, and Rome, into the Christian phase, when he arrives at the meaning of spirituality, and discerns the supremacy of Character. In short, I want to represent the whole history of man, physical and mental, as springing out of his capacity of love and self-consciousness; taking the creative power of the affections as the basis of all art and all religion; and I really do not know how far the idea is my own.'

'I tried,' said James, 'to instil something of the kind into Margaret once, but she would not comprehend it until she had committed blasphemy against nature by entering the convent from which I was seeking to keep her. But it is a mistake to suppose that it is plagiarism to elaborate ideas suggested by others. Ideas are foundlings, and have no real parentage, or, at least, none that can be ascertained. They are accretions, conglomerate rather than simple, and deriving their

constituents from too many sources to allow them to be ascribed to any single origin. As well might flint and steel contend for the exclusive ownership of the spark, as men for the sole origination of the idea, that is struck out between them.'

'Or father and mother for the exclusive parentage of their children,' said Noel, laughing.

'No, there the illustration fails,' said James decidedly, and with another covert look at Margaret. 'Man creates, the woman only nurses.'

Here Margaret rose from her place, and gathering her little ones to her, commenced to return home; and without further remark Noel and Maynard followed her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In a few days the house on the hill was abandoned, and a fair amount of comfort organised within the shelter of the *hacienda*. The remove was made with many regrets, especially on the part of Margaret and Noel, who promised themselves many an ascent to revisit the deserted home—scene of all that seemed to them to comprise their lives. Noel, however, soon ceased to feel any active regret when once established below; for not only was he thereby thrown into still closer contact with Margaret, but the little exigencies of the situation brought out to him yet more of the inexhaustible beauties of her nature. He knew not how charming a home-aspect she had imparted to the old dwelling until he beheld it stripped and empty. The desolate view of the new one made him shrink from it until he saw it in the warm light of her presence transformed into a scene of comfort and elegance, as under the wand of a beneficent fairy.

The sitting-room was left to be arranged last; and whether by accident or design, or by that unconscious art which indicates the truest genius, its transformation was accomplished with a suddenness and completeness that enhanced the result with all the charm of unexpectedness and contrast. A wilderness and a chaos of confusion in the morning when Maynard and Noel left the house for the day to visit the lower farms, it

was a bower of beauty and a haven of repose on their return.

Certainly, if trifles make elegance, Margaret was a mistress of such trifles. And she sat in the centre of the fair apartment, quietly engaged with her usual tasks, showing no signs of the toil and fatigue with which she had been all day labouring in its arrangement; her piano open, and the music lying carelessly on it, as if she had just been playing as usual; fresh flowers and ferns in every nook where a vase could find a footing; pretty gauze-blinds on the windows, betraying, as nothing else could, a feminine presence; and, to crown all, one little fairy child asleep on the sofa, wearied with helping mamma, and the other playing with a picture-book at its mother's feet.

Noel stood at the entrance amazed and enraptured with the loveliness of the unexpected picture. Maynard stood close behind him, and a gleam of delighted satisfaction lit up his face. But this lasted only for a moment. Bitter thoughts took possession of him, and he entered the room only to find innumerable faults with the details of its arrangement. Poor Margaret took his waywardness as a matter of course; but, though evidently pained and disappointed, defended her work with as much vivacity as she could muster. Noel was intensely annoyed, both at Maynard's ungraciousness and at being made a witness of its exhibition; but feeling that the best way for him to act was to treat it as a trivial matter, and one more jocular than serious, he managed to put an end to the disagreeable scene by saying gaily to Margaret,

'The next time you move I strongly recommend you to let him arrange everything himself, and then you will be able to criticise him in your turn.'

Margaret thanked him afterwards, when Maynard was absent at his office, for the way in which he had taken the matter, and said,

'I often wish that I could answer James in such a manner as to show that I am not hurt. I think that if he thought I did not feel it, he would not care to appear unkind. But I know how deep-seated his bitterness is, and that his harshness is the expression of a pain which he reproaches me with being the cause of; so that I cannot help grieving for him even when he most hurts me.'

'Ah, Margaret,' replied Noel, 'if only I could transfer to him your feeling for me, it would make you so happy that I

should die content in having served you so well, and glad to escape the envy of his delight.'

She shook her head sadly, and presently said,

'You can give me your opinion now upon those lines I mentioned the other day.' And taking the little packet from her pocket, she placed it in his hands, and asked him to read them to her.

He was sitting at the end of the sofa, and she, after giving him the paper, seated herself on a chair at a short distance from him, work in hand, ready to listen.

Glancing over the verses, as if to ascertain their character before reading them aloud, Noel presently let them sink with his hand into his lap, and pressing the other hand against his brow, was lost in thought.

'Are they yours?' he at length inquired.

She shook her head, saying,

'Only the handwriting.'

'They are not strange to me, but I certainly never wrote them, and I don't think I have read them anywhere.'

'Won't you read them to me?' she pleaded.

'I cannot read them aloud. I can only whisper them. So you must come and sit very close beside me.'

Margaret started, and said,

'That is how I got them. You whispered them while I was beside you in your fever, and I wrote them down.'

'As you are the subject and occasion of them, they are as much yours as mine. James was right as to there being no exclusive ownership of ideas. *We* are the author; and thus, Siamese-twin like, we will read our own composition to ourself.'

And, placing his arm round her, he drew her still closer to him, until the glory of her hair intermingled with the darkness of his own, and, flowing downward, hid the paper from their view, so that reading was impossible.

It was a moment of bliss; and Margaret was the first to wake from it. Disengaging herself from his embrace, she seated herself again on her chair, saying playfully,

'You can read better without my help.'

'Ah, Margaret, what a thing it is to be troubled with a sense of much duty!'

'What would you have me do?' she exclaimed in a forlorn tone.

'Dearest, you are always right. Come only a little nearer, and I will whisper our verses to you.'

She complied, and he read, in a low, intense voice, her record of the thoughts which had raged in his brain, and aided the elements in producing his fever; and which, assuming a rhythmical form, had been repeated by him unconsciously when Margaret was tending his sick bed. Irregular and disconnected, they yet were an irresistible proof to Margaret, had she needed one, of the completeness with which her idea had taken possession of Noel, and how acutely he felt leaving her. She had entitled them 'Whispers.'

'Well, but,' said Noel, after the pause that followed the reading of this strange record of his semi-delirious ravings, 'how came you to let any one but yourself enter my room when I was given to talking in such fashion?'

'I observed that you never spoke but when I was close beside you,' replied Margaret, 'and that you were to a certain extent under my control. It seemed to me as if I had only to intensely desire you to be quiet, and you obeyed. Besides, you never uttered a name; so that your words, coming, as they did, in a low, moaning tone, would have been quite incoherent to another. I don't know how many I lost before I discovered that they had a certain coherency, and began writing them down; and I was half afraid you would be vexed with me for doing that. But they were too precious to me to lose; and I did not know that I should ever hear your real voice speaking to me again.'

'I really must forbid,' he answered, 'your ever talking or thinking of it as a possibility that I should be vexed with you. I might much more easily be vexed with myself; for, please understand, the feeling is always with me that regards you, not as another, but as a better, self to me. Wherefore, you are always to fulfil the part of that better self, act out your own nature, and tell me exactly your real thought.'

'You have assigned me an onerous post,' said Margaret, 'but I will do my best to fulfil your wish'

CHAPTER XXIV.

LIFE in the *hacienda* proved by no means as irksome as had been anticipated. The noise of the mills soon became so much a matter of course as to pass unnoticed by both Margaret and Noel. Conversation in a low tone was as easy as ever, and, with few distractions, the routine of life proceeded as pleasantly as before. Noel's book, now actually commenced, was one great resource, ever affording something to be discussed. It was his wont, whenever a difficult situation threatened his characters, to consult Margaret upon the conduct to be exhibited in the emergency; and he derived much delight and amusement from observing that she invariably and as a matter of course considered only, not what each one might like best to do under the circumstances, but what would be the requirement of the strictest duty; and from the discussions which arose as to how far she herself would be likely, under similar circumstances, to be so self-conscious as to ignore impulse and think of duty at all. It never occurred to her that people could be otherwise than perfectly good, and anxious only to act up to the highest possible standard; though she admitted that of late she had come to understand better how that there might be temptation too strong for some—perhaps for any—dispositions to resist.

It was a source of great amusement in the evening to submit the morning's work to James, and to observe how invariably he disapproved of the line taken, and would have each character act in an entirely different manner; and this, particularly in the instances where Margaret had dictated the course.

'I declare,' said Noel to him one evening when he had been more than usually captious in his criticisms, 'you make me think that that story about you at Oxford was no libel after all.'

'What story?' asked Margaret.

'It was told of the early days of his Fellowship that it was so much a matter of course for him to differ from whatever was said by any one else, that the men who sat at the same table with him in Hall, once agreed to assent to everything he might say, and, if possible, to make controversy for once impossible to him. He was always late in taking his seat, so that the others had assembled in time to arrange their plans. The conversation which had been going on was stopped for him to start it afresh. Finding them all silent, he made some remark, which

was assented to. He made another remark, and that was assented to also. Somewhat surprised, he then launched one of his most startling paradoxes: but this met only with the most cordial reception, and not a word was uttered in opposition. A second paradox shared the same fate; and he is reported to have been so amazed that he gazed around on his companions, and exclaimed in a tone of anguish, 'Gentlemen, we are wonderfully unanimous to-day!'

James laughed heartily at the story, and said that he had heard it before, with a slight variation, but did not know it had been told of himself; adding,

'Perhaps it might have done me some good to have been told of it; though I am always an enemy to stagnation, and think it better to fight than die. If I had to be a Scripture character, I think I should prefer being the angel who stirred the pool, to any other. By the way, what would yours be?' he asked of Noel.

'That depends. To stand, like the Apostle on the hill of Athens, and denounce the world's humbug, is a position that has its charms for me. I should like to have written the poetry of Isaiah and Job, and the glorious utterances ascribed to Balaam. I wonder the Jews were not too jealous of the Canaanitish prophet to preserve his poetry. But for a single character, commend me to David. He *lived*, and he wrote, too; sinned with his whole heart, and repented with his whole heart: and lived long enough for sorrow to mellow into sentiment, and to suffuse his poetry with his own experiences. There was such a thoroughness about him that I always regret that Shakespeare did not take him for one of his characters. None but Shakespeare could do justice to David's pre-eminent humanity.'

'Now, Margaret, let us have your confession of faith,' said James.

'I am scarcely so familiar with the Scriptures as to be able to make and to justify my choice as you have both done,' she said; 'but I think there is one of whom it was said that she was forgiven much because she loved much.'

'A confession, indeed!' exclaimed Maynard. 'And for a man's wife to make before a third party! A somewhat new line for you to take, too.'

Fearing to distress her, and to irritate him, Noel restrained the disposition he felt to laughter, and led the conversation into another and less personal channel.

'The main difficulty that I feel about character-drawing,' he said, 'is caused by the impossibility of going to the basis of actions, and referring them to their proper motives. The conduct and relations of people are in so great a degree referable to their physical organisation and temperament, that their lives are unintelligible unless accompanied by such revelations as are either actually unascertainable, or conventionally impossible. An American writer has written a capital story in illustration of the difficulties which beset the popular notion of free-will. His heroine, Elsie Venner, owing to her mother having been bitten by a rattlesnake, inherits a mixture of rattlesnaky and human blood, with character to correspond; and so shows that we may be dependent for our very nature upon something that occurred before we were born. It seems to me that literature, especially that which pretends to be biographical, consists of little else than a series of suppressions: whereas, real art ought to be a revelation.'

'The question is,' said Maynard, 'whether what you require is not already taken for granted, and the reader interprets what he reads by his knowledge of that tolerably constant quantity, human nature. To write as you wish to write, you must become a more than Frenchman. In France, literature and the drama are for grown-up folk: girls are kept in seclusion, and don't go to the theatres. The English are so eminently domestic a people, that they like to have their children with them on all occasions. Hence the dominant ingredient in our books, plays, and sermons is "milk for babes." It was not always so, and I am not sure that we have degenerated since the change.'

'No doubt we have gained in the purity that postulates ignorance; but I want to combine purity and philosophic analysis.'

'Did you ever notice,' asked Maynard, 'how near Paul was to a great fact when he complained of the law in his members warring against the law of his mind? Had our phrenologists got hold of him, they would soon have explained to him that he had too much brain behind his ears, or that his frontal hemisphere was liable to accessions of excitement which re-acted on his domestic faculties, keeping up a constant struggle between what he thought to be the entities of sin and holiness, but which were in reality only his natural and legitimate faculties struggling for their due exercise. I think that where the critics will quarrel with you will be in your admitting into the domain

of art a style of analysis that has hitherto been appropriated by science, theology, or philosophy.'

'I hope to attempt it, nevertheless. In the grandest line ever uttered by poet or prophet I find a perpetual prompter against submitting to a clique or a fashion :—

"And God fulfils Himself in many ways."'

'Do you know,' said Maynard, 'that I rather wonder how it is that you have in you so much of the spirit of a reformer. Had you been needy, or harassed by social inequalities, it would be only natural for you to resent your disabilities.'

'To each his own,' answered Noel. 'You, born with, or developing, a hatred of ignorance, find your natural outlet in acquiring or imparting knowledge. I, having somehow got an idea of what the world might be, kick against the restraining limitations. Thus, science and poetry are not so very far apart from each other.'

'Unity of the natural faculties again,' observed Maynard. 'It is very curious to see how constantly the train of modern thought carries us to the idea of unity in all things: unity of physical life, unity of intellectual life, unity of moral life, ever revealing itself to the unbiased thought of mankind, until we find ourselves brought face to face with the idea of universal Oneness, similar to that which formed the intense and absorbing impression of the founder of Christianity. None have recognised so vividly as Jesus the unity of the moral universe with Deity. The famous Frenchman who has given a new system of philosophy to our age, seems similarly to have felt the necessity of unity in the physical sciences, before he set about to demonstrate its existence. And yet, though working in precisely the same direction, Auguste Comte considered himself to be anti-Christian, and his followers are dubbed Atheists! It is much the same with our own admirable Darwin.'

'Another illustration of the multiplicity of the ways in which God fulfils Himself,' said Noel, 'as well as of man's unconsciousness as to the significance of his own work. I suppose the truth is that all work done in obedience to the real spontaneous impulse of any one's nature, and done conscientiously, helps to carry forward the development, or, as Paul called it, manifestation, of the Divine idea in the world; so that those who insist on compliance with arbitrary standards, hinder progress exactly in so far as they are successful in quenching the spirit that prompts to original effort.'

'And so you come round to my theory of differentiation after all,' said Maynard, laughing.

'I would have people follow different directions in order to arrive at the same end, by the route best suited to each individual,' said Noel; 'whereas you hold that their ultimate objects should be different. I would have them separate in the hope of meeting again at last; but you would invent and perpetuate differences where natures are the same.'

'Once upon a time,' said Maynard, 'when nearly knocked up with work, I found myself, after sitting up late correcting proofs, dreaming that my article had come out filled with blasphemies and other blunders. Among other things, I appeared to have asserted that God is blue!—and I set myself, in my sleep, to concoct a note explanatory of so startling a dogma. To my surprise on waking, I found not only that the notion, which to my nightmare had seemed so shockingly absurd, had a glimmer of sense in it, but that I had actually lit upon a passable solution; for I had based it upon the fact that the Sanscrit for the firmament is *Dyaus*, whence come the Greek *Zeus* and *Theos*, and the Latin *Deus*, showing these names of God to be derived from the blue sky.'

'Doubtless you can with equal plausibility interpret the familiar phrase, "till all's blue,"' said Noel, laughing.

'Precisely what I was about to do, in illustration of our conversation. It means, till all be finally lost in God, absorbed in Deity, as in the Nirvana of the Buddhists and the heaven of the Evangelicals. Sailors, of course, apply it to the sea, which takes its colour from the sky, and mean by it, till nothing remain above water. I suspect the differences we have been discussing will continue until "all is blue" in the Buddhist sense.'

CHAPTER XXV.

As January approached its close, one thought occupied all minds in Mexico. The combined forces of England, France, and Spain had landed at Vera Cruz, and people were anxiously wondering what would be the result of the agreement between the European powers 'to compel Mexico to fulfil the obliga-

tions already solemnly contracted, and to give a guarantee for the effectual protection of the persons and property of their countrymen.'

Intimately acquainted, as Maynard was, with the Spanish pride and more than Spanish obstinacy of the ruling classes, he feared the worst consequences from the hostile tone of this manifesto; and his apprehensions were by no means allayed by the additional announcement that 'the allied powers declined any intervention in the domestic affairs of the country, and especially any exercise of pressure on the will of the population with regard to their choice of a government;' because he thought he perceived in it an appeal to the masses, who were only too ready to rise against their domestic oppressors, and who, in doing so, would doubtless overwhelm all foreigners in one general catastrophe.

'If the allied governments,' said Maynard to Noel, 'would only make terms with Juarez, who is out and out the best president Mexico has had for years, and enable him to hold his position until he can raise the people in his favour, and defy the nobles with safety, all will go well. Hitherto the emancipation of the serfs has been but a curse to them. Make Juarez strong enough to follow his own wishes and give them the lands to which they are undoubtedly entitled, and Mexico will be far on the high road to its regeneration. I never felt so inclined as at this moment to become a meddler in other people's affairs. Were I a free man, and no one's interests at stake but my own, I would go straight to Juarez and the leaders of the expedition, and give them no peace until I had made them see the matter in my own light.'

'But you said that Juarez already holds this view,' observed Noel.

'So he does, but he believes that the aristocratic governments of Europe are incapable of admitting it to a moment's consideration. And I am afraid he is right.'

While thus revolving the situation, letters arrived from England. Among Noel's was this from Sophia Bevan, in reply to one that he had written to her about a month after his arrival at the *Real:*—

'I suppose that by the time this reaches you, you will have forgotten all about the letter to which it is an answer. But I can't help that. I can only judge you as you were; not as you will be.

'I am not a bit satisfied with your account of yourself or of the Maynards. You don't tell me a quarter enough. I infer more, perhaps, than you will allow that I have a right to infer; but if you will speak in riddles, and deal in the abstract and general when I want particulars, you must take your chance of what I may say in reply.

'My recommendation to you to come home and get married, and settle down, seems to have come somewhat *mal à propos*, to judge by the comments to which you give vent concerning the honourable state of matrimony in general. I should like to know what you have seen in your travels, and what people you have been among, to produce the bitterness that pervades your observations. I am sure mine could not have done it all. Now, please, don't go and charge me with jumping at conclusions, but for once praise my penetration, if I am right in believing that the hints I have before given you about our friends are founded in fact: in short, that you, witnessing their incongruity, commiserating their unhappiness, or, perhaps, sympathising with at least one of them, have written under a feeling of irritation at the strength of the tie that binds them to each other.

'You know that I never mince matters with a friend; so that if I ever have an idea involving an injustice, I always put myself in the way of getting myself set right. I may be going off on a false scent entirely; but off I go anyhow, leaving it to you to bring me back to the right track.

'Do you know that I sometimes think you have commissioned our old friend, the "—Review," to preach at me in your absence. I am constantly finding the subjects that we have discussed together, treated of in such fashion as to make me think you dictate articles for it by some somnambulic or mesmeric process; and they always take your side of the questions, too, which is very aggravating.

'Your life generally has been one so detached from the ties that ordinarily bind people, and your liberty is so inseparable a part of yourself, that you naturally are apt to fancy that ties must be bad things in themselves. Hence, the spectacle of any special hardship or inconvenience caused by one, makes you revolt against all. But does it never strike you and other bewailers of the irrevocability of the tie matrimonial, that there are other ties as irrevocable, binding, and galling? One can't get rid of a "stern parient" or a refractory child. One has to

bear them for life, and make the best of them. In the case of women, especially, is this so. *We* have to live together for life, almost as closely, morally, as husband and wife, and to adapt ourselves as painfully to each other's tempers and peculiarities. Luckily for me my stepmother is an *angel* (though she does flirt so outrageously with your darling of an uncle); and, luckily for her, I'm another. Perhaps I am not sufficiently alive to the special repugnances that may exist between husband and wife. Still, I do see so much oppression arising from family relationships, which are not in any way elected or chosen as in marriage, that I am provoked at finding all the sympathy claimed by those who have made their own unhappiness by an injudicious choice. No doubt a life-long tie to a distasteful companion is a hard penance for lack of discrimination of character; only it would be more true were character and suitability really the things chiefly looked for in most marriages. And, if you are honest with yourself, you will admit that such qualification is only secondary in the choice with most men. (I say *men* advisedly, as they are the only real choosers.) They are tempted by either beauty, money, or position; and the character—the relative character to their own, I mean—is taken for granted, or read into the chosen one, if thought of at all. And then it is always equally taken for granted that all modification, and adaptation, and tuning to harmony, are to be done by the poor she. I believe that, as a rule, the richer and larger nature of the two has to prune and adapt itself to the poorer and smaller; because the former can stoop, while the latter can't add a cubit to its stature. I doubt, however, if there is any real descent in the process. One is really on a nobler platform forcing oneself down into agreement with one's partner, than soaring alone. That one shows most weakness who is least able to tune itself to the pitch of the other.

'I know you affect a keen ear for human discords, and an ardent longing to make music of life. But I like the musician who tunes himself to his fellows or his circumstances, and shows himself capable of solution into the great whole of humanity. Sometimes I think difference of degree or temperature more difficult to harmonise than radical difference of character. The warmer nature feels the chill and contrast more painfully than the complacent self-sufficing iceberg. Polar regions are not sociable regions, and even icebergs must "bow their heads, and sink, and sail in the sea," if they seek warmer latitudes.

'Bear with me if I persist in asserting that it is the proof and prerogative of man's sovereignty to modify himself to suit his surroundings. Women, you know, are only sovereigns over men, and have no will to spare for governing themselves!

'I suppose, however, it is all a puzzle, and you will be writing me down a goose for trying my maiden hand upon it. Perhaps the spell is in the ring! The man I know who most utterly fails to adapt himself to his wife and his wife to himself, is, in the domain of simple friendship, the most adaptable man I know; and though holding his own bravely, is yet most amenable to criticism. He is a clergyman, as usual with my flames, a prophet—not a priest—parson; and a philosopher as well as a bit of a wag. He lately gave what he called a practical discourse on the faults and failings of the day, in which I rather looked for a little self-abasement on his part. But he had the impudence, in recommending the practice of more self-sacrifice to men, to select marriage as one of their neglected duties, and say that in most cases it is more of a sacrifice to marry than to remain single. And in this way he defended Christianity from the reproach so often brought against it, of not taking man's physical nature into account in its system of morality.

'It always seems to me odd that, while the woman's motherhood is so prominently put forth as her only claim to exaltation, the man's fatherhood is absolutely ignored. As to God's fatherhood, *cela va sans dire;* but as Creator chiefly. I have contented myself, however, with the explanation that the old creeds had so over-weighted the masculine faculty as an object of adoration, that perhaps we needed the balance of a religion which undervalued that element. My parson, however, pretended that, in setting forth an example of self-sacrifice, religion is really urging to marriage!

'I do so wish that you would come home. I have so much that I want to talk to you about; and in our communion of spirits, I hold the *real presence* of my friend so much more comforting than his letters. Society gets more and more disjointed, and I want you to come and be *Frauen-kämpfer* to an oppressed class. I am quite sure that we poor women are worth much more than we are allowed to be made of, and that *mankind* suffers by means of our disabilities. We are kept back by our non-education and social restrictions, and men are kept back in order to keep alongside of us. Men are brought up to every-

thing, and women are brought up only for one thing, marriage: —reason enough, you will say, why they don't do that well:— the education isn't *liberal* enough. Thus marriage forms but one of the resources or practices of men, while women have no other. You may think the arrangement a very nice one for your side, as securing you an ample choice; but it is an excessively cruel one for mine: and I am quite certain that the advantage to you is delusive, and that what you gain in quantity, is more than lost in quality; for you have a lower order of woman to select from. The result of the present system is that it scarcely affords an example of a woman who is fit to be a helpmeet to man or a mother to children. I, a woman, say this. Uneducated, even when most "*accomplished*," we are taken up by the merest trifles, absorbed in the pettiest gossipry, and destitute of all principle, except that of deceiving men to our own advantage. What we are you make us,—cunning and untruthful, for does not our strength lie in our wiles?

'Now I want to see my sex—for I have a sex, and believe myself a very woman, in spite of poor Lord Littmass's saying that no man would have me for wife or mistress. He didn't say it to me, of course, but I overheard it, and I want to know what he meant by it, and whether it was a compliment or not. I don't consider it one.—Well, I want to see my sex so far emancipated from their present disadvantages as to be more equal companions for men. I always hear that the best part of the talk at a dinner party comes on after "the ladies" have left the room. I cannot imagine a greater reproach to the whole system than this. We are so compelled to mediocrity that men wait for our departure that they may be free to indulge in excess, whether it be one of intellectual converse or of physical debauch.

'Do you ask my remedy for this state of things? It is, to put boys and girls more on the same footing, and to bring them equally up to an active and independent life, making work the purpose and marriage the accident,—a happy one, if it may be. Why should we, more than you, be compelled to ignore our talents and individualities, and spend our lives under the parental roof as merest slaves to parental caprice, regarded, not as goods, but as *bads* and chattels so long as we remain single? I am sure that the average of unmarried daughters are as capable of turning their liberty to good account as the average of unmarried sons; and better, for we have our emotions to con-

trol us, while men have only their principles. I have been thinking for some time that I shall devote my money and my spinster-hood to the foundation of a college for young ladies, who, having "finished their education," feel an impulse to learn something and do something useful in the world; and how can they do it better than by helping to carry on the education of their sex. I think you could help me in maturing my scheme. We can't manage such matters by ourselves yet. Men have got the start of us, and have appropriated to themselves five ounces of brain a-piece more than we have, (at least, so *masculine* anatomists say,) and we want their help to adjust the inequality. So I elect you my confessor and adviser, since by virtue of that "hieropathic affection" with which the female heart is not unduly credited, I am bound to have a priest of some sort.

'Your uncle has just written to say he is sending out letters to you by some officers of this dreadful expedition. Oh! I am so alarmed lest this meddling by foreigners should bring you all into trouble. I trust to you to make everybody that one cares for come away if there is any danger. I am sure we can all contrive to live at home comfortably enough without Mexican silver. Much as Mr Tresham once wished and urged the interference, I think he has lately changed his mind. He allows that James Maynard has managed admirably in keeping his mine from loss so far.'

This letter excited as much irritation as admiration on the part of Noel in respect to its writer, and he marvelled at the vivid and rapid instinct whereby the very reticence and vagueness of his own communication had been seized upon by his vivacious and plain-speaking friend, and converted into evidence against him. Spontaneous as it appeared, he detected its real art, and saw in the latter part of it only a proof of her unwillingness to wound, and of her anxiety to withdraw him from an imagined complication, by suggesting other fields for his ambition. Even the apparently casual and jocular remark about Mr Tresham's intimacy with Lady Bevan, read by this light, had for him a serious meaning. But other and more pressing matters came to occupy his mind at that time.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE letters of introduction to Maynard and Noel mentioned by Sophia were duly forwarded to them by their bearers, and a hope expressed of being able to meet them in the capital. But nothing that came from England produced such an effect upon Maynard as a despatch from his confidential agent in Mexico that reached him about the same time.

'It seems to me a positive duty to go to Vera Cruz,' he exclaimed, entering the room with the despatch open in his hand. 'Here has that savage, Marquez, for months been plotting the overthrow of Juarez under the pretext of aiding *Dios e Orden*, by which he means himself, while the refugees in Paris, with Miramon at their head, are agitating with the Empress and the Pope on behalf of the clergy and their forfeited property, and hatching some outrageous scheme which my agent has not yet been able to fathom: and the leaders of the expedition do not half like Juarez, who is the only man of any note here that has never perjured himself, and who alone represents whatever exists of a nation in Mexico. If the powers quarrel with him they quarrel with Mexico, and then good-bye to all hope of improvement or security. I am sure I could put the matter so clearly and forcibly before our minister as to compel him to stop the mischief. I am so glad you are here,' he said to Noel, 'to look after Margaret and the bairns. Otherwise, I could hardly have gone without taking them with me.'

'Surely it would be better for us all to go together,' suggested Noel, with heart beating at Maynard's speech so violently as to almost deprive him of the power of utterance.

'Will it not do as well if you write?' asked Margaret, falteringly.

'Utterly useless,' returned James. 'The only way of influencing diplomatists is to keep hammering at them until they can't help understanding a thing.'

'I wish I understood the question,' said Noel, 'and could take your place in urging your views.'

'But why should not I go, and leave you here; unless you are tired of us, and want to get away?' remonstrated Maynard.

Both Noel and Margaret felt that the strongest objection to such an arrangement was the one they could least put before James. Noel evaded the necessity of answering him by asking

what was the exact line that he proposed to take with the envoys.

'Understand,' answered Maynard, 'that at present there is no Mexico. It has been stifled, strangled, destroyed, or rather disintegrated, as a nation. Instead of the sentiment of country, nothing is visible save the two antagonistic parties respectively termed Clerical and Liberal, neither of which has any other object than its own advantage. These alone have the ear of the world; so much so, that even the President, who at heart and by blood favours and represents the real though dormant and suffering Mexico, rules only by the help of the Liberals. The real Mexico, the *patria* out of whose heart's blood the contending factions trample dominion and wealth, consists of the five or six millions of Indians, who, robbed of their lands, work and suffer at the dictation of their oppressors. If Juarez could only have the support of the Powers to enable him to cut loose from the Liberals and appeal to these, the regeneration of Mexico would soon be assured, and the whole sympathies of its great neighbour, the United States, the only power really able to influence its destinies for good, would come in aid. As it is, the Indian population has no chance of a hearing from the plenipotentiaries; for Juarez cannot openly take their part. And were he to attempt it, the prejudice of the foreign governments is too strong against him. And now Marquez will be able to convert their prejudice into open hostility.'

'I understand your view perfectly,' said Noel. 'But you are supposing the Powers to contemplate more than they profess by their interference. As I understand their aim, it is only to obtain restitution and security from whatever government they may find in existence, and by no means the regeneration of the country.'

'They know so well,' answered Maynard, 'that governments here are utterly unstable, and that when a new one comes in it recognises, not the obligations incurred by its predecessor, but only those incurred by its own partisans when in opposition, that they are sure to try and found something which shall be at once stable and responsible.'

'But it would involve a tremendous task to raise and organise the masses into anything like efficiency,' remarked Noel; and as he spoke the *padre* entered the room.

'What think you, Father,' asked James of him; 'supposing

the foreign powers wished to make Mexico a prosperous and stable country by raising the people to be citizens and proprietors, would it be very difficult to make the *millons* assist them?'

'*Vaya con Dios!*' cried the old priest, his whole countenance lighting up with enthusiasm, 'it is the only hope for *pobre Mejico*. Let them come and tell us that such is their intention, and the natives will rise all together and follow their priests into the field: and we shall have their gratitude, and the Church will be saved. Ah, you know how my predecessors, priests though they were, fought for their religion and their country against *los malditos Liberáles*. There are plenty more of us ready, like Hidalgo and Morelos, to take up arms for the good cause.'

'Mexican politics are certainly very puzzling,' remarked Noel. 'I thought that the clerical party was exclusively Spanish and conservative in its sympathies. You are representing it as native and revolutionary.'

'I can soon enlighten you on that point,' said Maynard. 'The clerical party, as a party, means the aristocratic party that, alternately with the Liberals, obtains the upper hand in the capital and the large towns. Our country *padres* repudiate them as far as they dare, and cast in their lot with their own people. But they, though doing this, hate and denounce Juarez; for, while they look to their popularity for the security of their position, he abominates every priest as an impostor and a vampire. Now I,' he added in a whisper for Noel's sole benefit, 'side with Juarez in politics, but I consider at the same time that he ought to avail himself of the influence of the country *padres* to raise the people, and leave other matters for future settlement. With the country priests against him, he will do little with the natives, unless, indeed, he can win them by a promise of the lands. There is thus, you see, a wide difference between the aristocratic and the patriotic clergy. Their ends, indeed, may be identical, namely, their own personal advantage; but their means vary with their positions. Now I would try first to persuade Juarez to conciliate the rural clergy, and then to persuade the plenipotentiaries to treat with Juarez in a friendly spirit, as the sole duly constituted representative of the country, and offer him aid to re-establish himself on a thoroughly popular basis.'

'You have put the matter into a nut-shell,' exclaimed Noel. 'Give me letters introductory and explanatory, and I will go to head-quarters, and save you the trouble.'

This proposition caused both his friends to look earnestly at him; Maynard, with the dubious aspect of one who hears something that he cannot all at once accede to; and Margaret, with an anxious, yet grateful expression, as in acknowledgment of the sacrifice for her sake which she recognised in his offer.

'Even if you go yourself,' continued Noel, 'you can but state the case as you understand it, to the parties concerned, whereas I can both state it, and leave your written account of it for their consideration. In no case will it do for you to go and leave everything and every one here so long. Besides, in the event of failure, the knowledge that you have interposed to such an end, may prove most injurious to the interests of the mine. Even you cannot compel agreement in your views, and, however convinced the envoys and ministers, personally, may be by you, there may be secret plans and schemes behind which will interfere with their compliance.'

'That is true enough,' replied Maynard. 'My agent intimates as much. His idea is that Austria has something to say in the matter.'

'Austria, of all powers, to be concerned with Mexico!' exclaimed Noel.

'Yes, the French Emperor has been mighty civil to Austria since the peace of Villafranca, and he is supposed to be concocting something by way of a set-off to its hard terms.'

'Well, let us settle it so. Do you write despatches in the requisite languages, and I will do my best as confidential emissary. Who knows but that I may get all the chiefs of the expedition together, to dine with me and drink the health of Juarez and the Real de Dolóres! Another advantage of my going, too, is that I may find out the officers who have brought the introductions, and invite them up here.'

All this was said too rapidly for the padre to follow it; and had he been able to do so, he would not have suspected Maynard of taking any part hostile to his side. On being appealed to by Margaret respecting the safety of the roads, he assured her that there was no fear of any additional risk on that score, since the people had no patriotism and regarded all disputes with the government as affecting only the two dominant parties. 'Mexico not being their own,' he said, 'they care only for their

religion. The next world thus finds this one no rival in their affections.'

It was finally agreed that James should write his views at length, and that Noel should convey them to head-quarters, travelling in such style as might impress the government and the plenipotentiaries with a sense of the magnitude of the interests he represented, and the importance of those whose opinions he came to advocate.

The next few days were a busy time for them all. Much care had to be exercised not only in the composition of the documents, but also in their translation. All contributed of their stock of knowledge, which was by no means slender. For those which required to be done into Spanish, the padre was utilised, he being, of course, more conversant with the idioms than any stranger could be; and Maynard found leisure to be immensely amused at the idea of employing the priest to concoct revolutionary despatches to Juarez, without his having the least idea of their real significance, or for whom they were intended.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was the middle of February, 1862, when Edmund Noel arrived in the city of Mexico, escorted by a large and formidable-looking body of cavaliers collected from the neighbourhood of Dolóres, whose noisy conduct and swaggering demeanour made him fancy himself back in those days of chivalry when retainers demonstrated and upheld the importance of their masters by the assumption of offensive and ludicrous airs.

The whole arrangement was distasteful to him, loving, as his natural disposition led him, to exhibit power by results only, and to magnify those results by their contrast with the apparent insignificance of the means whereby they have been attained. To him all show and noise were waste, and therefore ungraceful, and artistically a mistake, and he would gladly have dispensed with them. But he could not dispute the representation that, being in a barbaric country, it was necessary to adapt himself to its circumstances. He determined, however, rather to exaggerate than otherwise the simplicity and confidence

with which he would accost the various chiefs whom he expected to meet; and this, the more that he could not divest himself of a certain consciousness that the part he was enacting might possibly appear to some of them a huge piece of impertinence.

As he approached the capital the air was thronged with conflicting reports about the conduct of the invaders; how that they had declared war upon the government, and were marching straight upon Mexico; how that they had quarrelled among themselves, and were about to return home, baffled; and how that the fatal climate of the *tierra caliente* was making short work with the whole expedition. Noel's principal fear was that in the enormous press of business it would be impossible for him to obtain audience of the President. A private note from Maynard, however, prepared the way for him, and two days after his arrival he was sent for by Juarez to his official residence. In the interval he had ascertained the actual position of affairs. The Mexicans of the capital were in their first access of anger at what they deemed the unworthy concessions of the *Convention of La Soledád.*

As Noel entered the apartment he found himself keenly eyed by a middle-aged man of medium height and firm figure, just risen from a seat before a table which was covered with papers. The high cheek-bones, broad flat nostrils, swarthy complexion, straight black hair, and cold dark eye, indicated his pure Indian blood; while the black cloth morning dress, and black satin stock, indicated a republican simplicity borrowed from his neighbours of the United States.

A secretary was writing in the adjoining room, the door of which, after a momentary scrutiny of his visitor, was closed by the President; and Noel and Juarez were alone together.

'You come from my good friend, and are welcome. I hope you do not require me to speak English to you.'

He said this in Spanish, with slow and distinct utterance, so that Noel, who by this time had, under Margaret's tuition, become a very fair Spanish scholar, understood him perfectly. He intimated as much, and Juarez continued:—

'Your friend, Señor Maynardo, as he told me to call him,—he is a noble in his own country, I understand?'

'He is a noble,' answered Noel, 'and yet more noble by nature, through his genius, and his wide sympathies with all that is good and true, than even by birth.'

The President then inquired concerning the mine and its

success, and expressed a hope that it had escaped molestation by the wandering bands of robbers. Whereupon Noel told him of the attempt to capture James, and the good fortune which had enabled him to effect his rescue. When he had finished by relating how Maynard, finding his assailants were of Indian blood, had refrained from giving them up to the authorities, and released them with food and an admonition, Juarez was deeply moved, and said,

'Tell Señor Maynardo that I am most grateful for his thought of my people. He writes that you propose to urge his views upon the plenipotentiaries from Europe, in case they meet with my approbation. Have the goodness to explain them to me.'

Unfolding Maynard's Spanish letter, and spreading it upon the table, Noel described its purport, and revealed the bold but simple scheme whereby Maynard sought to make the foreign powers a party to the regeneration of Mexico. The cold eye of Juarez lit up as Noel proceeded from stage to stage of his statements, and referred to the document in support of them. And Noel himself warmed with eagerness as he felt more and more that in the proposals he was making lay the best, and probably the only, hope of regeneration for a noble old country. His Spanish came without an effort; he forgot the augustness of his auditor's presence; and he concluded by urgently and familiarly, as equal to equal, pressing him to read the paper carefully through after he was gone, and to let him know his opinion of the chances of its reception by the foreign envoys.

'If all men were as true as those of your nation,' said Juarez, when Noel had finished, 'the government of the world would be an easy task. I coincide with every sentiment you have so admirably expressed, and thank you and Señor Maynardo for the interest you take in the welfare of my unhappy country. The sole ambition of my life is to carry out that identical policy. I have reason to think that some progress was being made towards it. At any rate I have done my best to preserve faith with the foreigners settled in Mexico; and I hope to act with dignity and consideration towards the allied forces. If the real intention of the Powers corresponded with their professions, there would be no reason why all should not go well. To support me against both the Clericals and Liberals would be to contribute towards the maintenance of a stable government, because I should thereby be enabled to rely on the sympathy of the vast bulk of the population. Your country, Señor, alone means

us well, but it does not mean enough. England is honest in asking for fair treatment, but England will not interpose to revolutionise Mexico. She believes only in existing governments, and thinks it is not her business to replace them by others. As a rule she is right. Meddlers do more harm than good. Spain is——Spain. Mexico hates her, and she hates Mexico. She sufficiently shows that hatred by supporting the Pope and the priests. She covets, at the same time; but, alone, she is impotent to gratify her covetousness. France remains. France is neither our enemy nor our friend. I mean the Emperor. He is France in one sense, as I am Mexico in another. He is France triumphant, as I am Mexico dormant. Do you go hence to the ministers of those Powers, and speak to them as you have spoken to me:—in only one will you excite the smallest interest,—your own, the English minister. He will not show his interest; but he will tell you that, however true it may be that the only stable government will be one resting on a popular basis, he would exceed his instructions were he to take any part in promoting it; and that such things must be left to the people of the country. The Spanish minister will say that he comes in the interest of religion, meaning the Romish priesthood—who'—and here the speaker's eyes gleamed with a dangerous light—'have substituted for the sacrifices of human hearts wherewith our ancient priesthood defiled Mexico, their own crueller sacrifice, not of the human heart only, but of the intellect, the liberties, the affections, and of all that constitutes human excellence and happiness. And the French minister will state, in the civilest terms, that his Emperor is fully aware of what Mexico requires, and intends bestowing it upon her.

'But he will not tell you what that is. It is even probable that he does not know the Emperor's intention. Don Maynardo's correspondent has discovered that there is a mystery. I have discovered what that mystery is. Mark what I say: and when you see the English and the Spanish withdraw their forces, and leave the French here alone, remember that, though I have treated them so well as to excite the anger of the people, I knew at the same time that all concession would be useless: that I knew that the allies came here with totally different intentions; that I knew that France had deceived her allies, deceived Mexico, and sought only her own political advantage.

'This letter mentions Austria. I believe in Señor Maynardo. I believe in you. I will trust you with the solution of

that mystery, on your engaging to tell it to none but your friend, until public events prove me right.'

'Well,' he continued, when Noel had given him the required assurance, 'France has, ever since last summer, been urging the Archduke Maximilian of Austria, to allow himself to be made Emperor of Mexico!—and the proposal has been accepted by him on one condition, the condition that he be supported by both England and France, with force or otherwise as may be necessary. France has come here secretly pledged to make this archduke Emperor, but openly disclaiming all intention of interfering in the domestic affairs of the country. France has tricked England into coming here by a false pretence; and England will retire and leave France in the lurch when she finds it out. France has tricked the Austrian into believing that he has the support of England and of Spain. The question is, will he, too, have the good sense to retire when he learns that he is dependent solely on a power that has proved so false and undependable. He does not come of a wise race; and Emperors of Mexico have been unlucky. Now you can judge how far it is likely to be of use your going to the foreign ministers with suggestions for the regeneration of Mexico founded on a popular basis.'

Noel did not immediately reply. He was thinking of the course that Maynard would take under the altered circumstances. Presently Juarez continued,—

'I grant you one thing. By placing your views, in the clear and powerful manner of this paper, before the French minister, you may put into his hands an engine whereby an enthusiasm may be aroused on behalf of the Austrian, provided he comes. That is, you will be suggesting a popular cry in his favour. But you will also be judging between him and me, as to who has the best right to govern Mexico, and who is the most likely to succeed in governing it well. I am a full-blooded Indian, of a race older in this country than that of Montezuma himself,' he said, drawing himself up proudly: 'and if you honestly believe that this *Retrogrado*, this *Fanatico*, this Austrian archduke, will come here with truer sympathies for popular advancement than those which animate me,—go; go, and say so to the French minister, and put into his possession the means of accomplishing my downfall. For they will use your information, and use it against me. I, the patriot savage, Juarez, and my race, are of no account in European councils.'

'That France should entertain such a fantastic idea as that of making an Austrian archduke Emperor of any country in America, and should dare to hoodwink England in such fashion, are alike incredible to me,' responded Noel.

'Events will prove it, notwithstanding,' returned the President. 'But you are right on one point. France has obtained England's apparent consent by representing that the negotiations with Maximilian are the acts of the Mexicans themselves, by the agency of refugees from this country in Paris. It is only one falsehood more.'

'But I cannot see that the Emperor has sufficient motive for running such a risk, in a mere wish to please Austria,' persisted Noel.

'He is a man, and has a fanatic wife, who is subservient to the priests,' responded Juarez, shrugging his shoulders.

Noel had heard enough to convince him that it was impossible for him to prosecute his journey to Vera Cruz without further consultation with Maynard, and he wished earnestly that Maynard could be present to advise him.

Determining to write fully to him and await his answer in the capital, he rose to take his leave, announcing at the same time to the President the conclusion to which he had come. Juarez bade him a cordial farewell, expressed a hope of seeing him again, and added,—

'You alone have the light whereby to read my conduct under future events. The hope that animates me comes, not from the other side of the ocean, or from the rival parties here, but from the example and sympathies of the United States. Their government is friendly to me, and by its aid I shall finally triumph, if I ever do triumph. Their civil war but delays the end. That over, European interference with Mexico will be impossible. Adios!'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Noel wrote to Maynard a full account of his interview with the President, dismissed the greater part of his escort, and sent to the officers who had brought introductions from Mr Tresham

an invitation to visit him in the capital. He then set to work exploring the neighbourhood and its antiquities, his mind meanwhile being much pre-occupied by meditations on the position in which he stood toward his friends at Dolóres.

He had thought much over Sophia Bevan's letter, and he confessed to himself, though by no means willingly, that however disagreeable might be the sting of the goad of her keen insight and unflinching conscientiousness, there was yet a compensating value in the possession of so wise and faithful a monitor. If her warnings failed to have full weight with him, it was owing to what he considered the undue regard paid by her to conventional requirements. Probably the most essential difference between the guiding principles of their natures, consisted in the difference of value they respectively attached to the dictates of Society and those of individual feeling.

Never until Noel knew and loved Margaret had he realised the full extent of the surrender of the affections demanded by social ordinances. 'It is to Society,' he remembered Sophia saying to him, 'that we owe all our pleasures; and we should not grudge some sacrifice in return.' But now it seemed to him that it was to Society he owed all his misery, inasmuch as it was the creator of arbitrary barriers to the fulfilment of human affection.

Looking at the position from what might be Margaret's point of view, had she been other than she was, he rebelled against the law that makes marriage an abjuration of love and all its joys, save only on the success of a doubtful experiment, and one of which it virtually forbids the repetition. With all other objects of difficult quest, is it not man's highest privilege and praise to try and try again until he succeed? And in this the most important of all quests, the quest for the highest happiness to be found in the fulfilment of his nature, and to succeed in which man would gladly sacrifice all other ambitions, can it be right that all should depend on the success of the very first attempt?

'Oh, my poor love!' exclaimed Noel to himself in anguish, 'hard as was your lot before, I——I have made it worse. I have raised you from the gloom of the night wherein you dwelt, only to show you the glorious day for a moment, and then to let you fall back into deeper darkness. The angel of love has roused you from your sleep only to whisper the charm in your ear, and has passed on, leaving you bewildered and hopeless.

Ah, me: if God indeed be love, why hath he made despair. It cannot be so. Despair is of human manufacture, the work of a world that knows not God, and in its ignorant Atheism sets up the cruel deity of Convenience, and sacrifices to it its dearest and its best. Oh, Social Exigency, thou art a worse demon, and exactest crueller human sacrifices than ever were offered to the old gods of Mexico.'

He remembered that Juarez had made a like comparison between the old religious system of the country and that by which it had been supplanted; and he pursued the train of thought until he fancied he found the root of all the social evils under which humanity ever groaned in the institution of priesthoods. It was they who had imposed restrictions grievous to be borne, and riveted them by sanctions which had no basis in the nature of things. It might thus well be in the pursuance of the loftiest spirit of real religion, that Juarez had adopted the career which had gained for him from the priests his appellation of the Archdestroyer.

It was characteristic in Edmund Noel thus to adapt that which occupied him in the external world to his own inner mood. At once engaged in politics, absorbed in his passion, and endeavouring to explore the traces of man's ancient history scattered over the plains of Anahuac, he unconsciously mingled all in his imagination. Little as there was in his own reflections to please him, there was even less in that by which he was surrounded. He was not in the humour to enjoy the society of the capital. Everything connected with man there struck him as unutterably frivolous and repulsive; save only the momentary gleam of enthusiasm that had warmed the cold eye of Juarez as he spoke of the possibilities of the regeneration of his race; saving, also, the pleasant little Court presided over by the fair wife and daughters of the President. For Noel, the existing city of Mexico was a ruin sinking into a cesspool, morally as well as physically. Man had neglected nature, and nature was taking her revenge. The ancient indigenous civilisation, under which alone the country had ever thriven, had been supplanted by the Spanish, and to no good purpose. It had done little for man that the Catholic cathedral had been built upon the site of the *Teocalli*, the great pyramidal temple of the Aztec war-god: or that the banqueting-hall of the man-eating priests of Huitxilopotchli had been superseded by the man-torturing, soul-devouring Inquisition. A religion of open bar-

barity had only yielded to one of secret cruelty. The conquering race had sunk to the level of the conquered, and sought to sustain its unjust sway by foreign aid. And now an aboriginal son of the soil had arisen to complete the destruction of the oppressors of his brethren, and had commenced by destroying in his turn the very structures which had been used to convert the superstitious fears of his countrymen into instruments for their own subjugation.

Certainly the priests had good reason to hate Juarez. The revolution of 1824, while following the United States in its general political system, had placed the Church on the same footing that it occupies in France. The ecclesiastical revenues had been *resumed* by the State, and the maintenance of religious worship was made an annual charge in the Budget. There remained, however, an enormous mortmain property; and of this the clergy were deprived by a law brought in by Juarez in 1859.

There was a volcanic abruptness, strongly savouring of the country, in the manner in which Juarez set himself to complete his mission of 'disendowment and disestablishment,' that was anything but conciliatory to the *clerigos*. Not twelve months before Noel's present visit, it had been his practice to make the round of the churches, escorted by troops, and superintend in person the work of demolition. The pulling down of a church promoted the double economy of saving money by rendering an appropriation for its maintenance unnecessary, and of making money by the sale of its materials and site. It, clearly, was Juarez's view that it was the duty of the State to transfer wealth which was used for the detriment of the State, to those who might turn it to account in the interests of humanity and civilisation.

Noel, smarting under the restrictions imposed by social law upon the exercise of his affections, as he supposed himself to be, thus found himself regarding with satisfaction the destruction of the artificial, and the symptoms of a return to the original basis of nature.

'How long will man's teachers, affecting the name of religious, prefer warring against nature to working with it? And when will the deeper and holier human feelings be accepted as the best indicators and arbiters of man's duty?'

Thus chafing and moralising in turn, Noel found himself at length asking of himself what would be his course if he really

possessed the freedom for which he was pining. Would he incur the rebuke of another Nathan by depriving his friend of his one ewe-lamb, when he had all the world to choose from?

Here, again, there rose to his lips a reproach against the ordinance which tends to produce in people the notion of absolute and perpetual ownership in each other; and he found himself condemning the irrevocability of the marriage-bond as being essentially immoral, inasmuch as it is a rebellion against nature, and a treason to the indefeasible right of the affections. 'Were people brought up and habituated to regard such connection as dependent on the corresponding feelings, there would be no plea for the amazement and agony which men now feel on discovering that their homes are no longer the abode of the love that originally filled them. The habit of regarding marriage as irrevocable, produces negligence concerning the maintenance of the affections at the right pitch. The bird safely caged, no bond of mutuality is needed to ensure its detention.'

Soon Noel passed out of this phase of reflection into a more practical one. 'Whatever be the cause, or the propriety,' he said to himself, 'the fact is indubitable that James is bound up in his idolatry; and to rob him of his idol would be to destroy him soul and body. All that I have been thinking might have some application in the case of a villain,—an enemy,—or, perhaps, a stranger. But here is my friend, esteemed and honoured of me, and more than esteemed and honoured of *her*. She would die rather than cause him a grief, and I would die rather than cause her an humiliation. Any conduct whereby I might indicate the possession of a lower nature than that for which she gives me credit, would cause her humiliation, for it would show her that her love was unworthily placed; so should I cause her the bitterest mortification a noble nature can feel. To such an one as Margaret the discovery that she loves unworthily would be far more painful than any failure to win love. Not only up to my own best, but up to her best, must I act if I would retain her regard, and spare her this pain. Thus does human feeling rise in support of conformity to the letter of social convention, even when most in conflict with its spirit.

'Yet, again, supposing I do act so as to incur the forfeiture and withdrawal of her respect and affection, may she not then learn to bestow *all* upon *him;* and at last, by means of my voluntary degradation, come to achieve a happiness now deemed unattainable? Could I, moreover, bear to witness their happi-

ness, thus purchased at the cost of their regard for me, I all the time knowing that I only deserve that regard the more? Is a loftier self-sacrifice possible to man than through such a motive to court the appearance of evil while shunning the reality? And would it not be evil to do so?

'Here, again, putting aside all thought of self, the higher morality seems to declare against any such abdication of one's true place in the scale of being. I fear that even such self-sacrifice as this is forbidden me by the very terms of the higher law to which I am appealing; for he who, being esteemed good, allows or makes himself to appear as bad, thereby lessens men's faith in goodness, and lowers human nature from its just rank. And no amount of individual gain in happiness can balance the general loss in faith.

The last solver of problems is Death. My death is welcome would it but make her happy,—and him. In no case could I live to see their happiness. Thank heaven, I am not so far removed from ordinary humanity as to approach such degree of self-abnegation as that would involve. But my death would not make them happy. They were even more miserable before I came upon the scene. Margaret longed for death, until she learnt what love meant. Her death would indeed free her from the hated bondage, but it would leave both him and me wretched. Alas, it is but too clear. The sole death whereby any might gain is *his;* and from that I rejoice that I have been the means of once saving him. None know this but myself. They think it was only capture and ransom that I rescued him from; but it is certain to me that, bound and dragged as he was, life must in a few moments have been extinguished.

'But I did not know it was he whom I was saving. True: but of this I am quite certain, that had I known it, I should have been still more eager in the rescue.

'How will it end? how will it end? Poor Margaret has already disproved her favourite doctrine, that

"All life needs for life is possible to will."

And I,—I have no will for that which will leave her hapless. Thought is vain, and action flies me. It seems as if I can only wait, and watch, and live the best: and if the slow sweet hours bring me all things good, I will bless them; or if the slow sad hours bring me all things evil,—well, I will try to bless them also; or, at least, not to curse them. His was a happy philosophy who said that whenever he found himself in a dilemma,

he looked around to see how he could make the issue most conducive to his credit, and thus was enabled to count it a joy when he fell into divers temptations.'

Thus probing himself, Noel came to distrust the accuracy of his earlier conclusions, which had led him to ascribe his own sufferings to the exigencies of a superfluous social law. For in seeking and finding the sole basis of his philosophy in his own sensations, he discovered that he owned no law of action or limitation out of himself. His own nature alone provided him with his prompter, his standard, and his guide. His own individuality asserted itself as a law, transcending that of mere social convenience. He aimed at a civilisation which would supersede organisation.

So, passing out of the phase in which conventions were hateful to him, if only for the reason that they were conventions, he came to admit to himself that there might be a degree of truth in Sophia Bevan's favourite dictum, that conventional law is only the result of an attempt to formulate the popular view of *higher law*—even of that higher law to which alone he accorded his respect.

Calling to mind the quaint saying by which some one has expressed a doubt of the separate and personal existence of the Evil Spirit,—'that he had never heard of any wickedness which man was not capable of committing of himself,'—Noel did not see why a similar remark should not be made in respect of man's capacity for goodness. If, thus controlled, his every thought could be for the supremest good of those with whom he had to do, might he not fairly regard Nature as the sole divine organism, and Love as the disposition alone necessary to conduct it towards the highest harmony; and so, rightly repudiate with indignation the notion that man requires for the guidance of life a rule that is external to, independent of, or opposed to, Nature? 'If it were merely an external law enacted without reference to my nature,' he said to himself, 'I should be justified in repudiating its claim to authority. But how if it be the law of my own nature that is governing me? I cannot rebel against that.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

NOEL received a reply from his friends of the Fleet long before he could expect one from Maynard. The position of the allied forces in Mexico and the terms of the 'Convention of La Soledád' made it impossible for them to visit the capital at that time, but they proposed a meeting at the head-quarters of the British Minister near Orizaba. This was one of the three places in the highlands which Juarez had assigned to the Allies out of consideration for the health of their troops during the interval necessary for reference to their home governments. It was this concession that had offended the pride of the Mexicans.

The proposition fell in very happily with Noel's humour and plans, for it promised a healthy distraction for his own thoughts, which he acknowledged to himself were becoming somewhat morbid. It would enable him to see the most beautiful part of the whole country without going out of his way for the express purpose of doing so; and it would place him within reach of the British plenipotentiary whenever Maynard's answer might come. He had already made up his own mind as to what was best to be done, and he had little doubt of being backed in it by Maynard's letter.

The brief history of this excursion will be best gathered from Noel's letter to Maynard, into parts of which he purposely infused an esoteric meaning for Margaret's exclusive apprehension.

'Orizaba, *March*, 1862.

'I found myself partaking the common decay in Mexico, and was glad of an excuse for coming here. I know now why I was unable to share the general admiration for the city and plain of the ancient Anahuac. I approached it from the wrong side, and approached it too nearly. And I blamed it for lacking the rare faculty of being perfect from all points of view and at all distances,—as if aught purely mundane could be thus perfect. I have long been convinced of it: levels and plains do not suit me, in any respect whatever. Man needs facility for mental drainage as much as the city does for physical. I don't believe in equability. Moods are our refuge against morasses. Give me eagles *versus* turtles; even tumbler-pigeons *versus* mudlarks. How you must be anathematising the mood

which makes me at this moment doff the world of Mexican politics aside, and indulge in metaphysics. That is because you are caring more for public affairs than for me and mine. Now, I like my friend's letter to be a photograph of himself, showing how he is at the moment of his writing. But then, perhaps, this is owing to what you call the feminine element in my character. Pray, then, regard this as a joint letter, and let the feminine portion of the recipients appropriate her kindred share.

'You have both seen the scenery amid which I am sojourning. But you saw it in passing, and without leisure to dwell upon its beauties. You came up to it from the lowlands. I have come down to it from the heights. My friends here, capital light-hearted fellows, as sailors are wont to be, are, after their roasting and stewing in the *tierra caliente*, in ecstasy with the keen bracing air, and wild mountain views, with cloud and cascade, and, ever dominant over all, the white perpetual peak of Orizaba. Having gone no farther, they are prepared on their return home to swear that Mexico is the most beautiful country in the world. Wouldn't it be a pity that they should go farther; that they should pass the beauteous portal and behold the hideous wilderness and reeking charnel-house beyond? The very country itself is to me but a mockery of life. The only fair portion lies in the *betweens*. Above and below, all is either barrenly bare, or poisonously luxuriant. Moralists say that goodness consists in doing, not in being; so that I suppose one has a right to look for excellence only in processes of transition, such as this passage from one altitude to another.

'History and tradition say that the upper lands here were once magnificently wooded, and that the Spaniards brought the barrenness with them, or made it. It is somewhat curious, but why should a Spaniard hate a tree? It may be said of them, as it was so often said of the Jewish reformers of old, that they "cut down the groves." Now, considering that those groves were for the worship of the queen of heaven of their day, the Virgin Ashtoreth, and that the Spaniards are so specially devoted to the corresponding worship of our day, it does seem to me very inconsistent in them not to have spared the necessary trees. But perhaps it is their love of home that has made them reproduce the naked table lands of Castile on the plain of Mexico. The Indians set them a more orthodox example in the neighbouring town of Cholula. There, on the summit of the

largest *teocalli* in Mexico, stands a chapel dedicated to the Virgin. In it priests of Indian descent only are allowed to officiate, and multitudes of pilgrims come yearly from all parts of the country to celebrate her festival. The worship of the Virgin on the Pyramid is a combination which ought to content even such an exacting votary of primeval antiquity as James Maynard. Ha! have I truly divined the source of the impulse which controlled the selection of your own abode?

'I must confess that Mexico has a charm for me only so long as above and across the desolation shines that one bright spot of light, el Real de Dolóres, where the hearts and brains of friends beat in pleasant accord with the pulses of my own. Do you remember Bunyan's Evangelist asking the Pilgrim, "Do you see yonder shining light?" Well, it is only such a loadstar as I see glimmering across the waste that would ever lure me back again to your heights. Your friendship has made it seem a natural home to me, and I see nought across the Atlantic to make Europe more attractive. I suppose I shall have to go some day; but I shall wait for a "call."

'Sophia Bevan jokes in her letter about my uncle flirting with Lady Bevan. My new friends here say that the flirting is all between him and Sophia, and that they think it would be wise in me to go home and prevent mischief! Poor dear Sophy; everybody does not understand her expansive manner so well as I do. I should rejoice to see her well married, but I have not yet succeeded in discovering the kind of man she would suit. She piques herself on her adaptability. But I suspect that, without in the least intending it, she rather means her own power to compel a man to adapt himself to her. My doubt is whether any one man can do it. She could not wait upon his moods, or drill herself into waiting for him to acquire force and variety to follow hers. The fact is, no one man could marry the whole of her. Her idea of her own fittest sphere is probably the right one. As wife of a statesman, whose occupation lay much away from her, but who also was thereby called on to entertain a large and varied society, she would fulfil her part admirably. As queen of the *salon*, surrounded by the distinguished and the aspiring in all lines, she would reign supreme.

'But I have not yet been able to imagine her as queen of a single heart, each supremely content with the other, and anxious only for liberty to develop love into worship. I have no fear of

her closing with my uncle, or he with her. Lady Bevan is much more in his line, and I don't think such a match would be an unwise one. Though why elderly folk should not enjoy each other's society *ad libitum* without the ceremony of irrevocability, is by no means apparent to me. However, I am far from certain that I am not also biased in favour of like liberty for younger ones. Artificial restraints are but poor substitutes for moral ones, and no doubt have the effect sometimes of suggesting that the latter are altogether superfluous. In the multiplicity of human laws, people are apt to forget the divine; and so the sense of moral responsibility vanishes. I suspect the parliament of the future will go in for fewer laws, but more stringent fulfilment.

'I have taken up my abode in Orizaba itself. The dons of the expedition are in the factory just outside; and as I don't want to come into contact with our Minister until I hear from you, I have spent most of the time in taking my sailors on excursions in the neighbourhood. We made an attack on the seventeen thousand feet of Orizaba; but as the natives in charge of our provisions declined to go farther than their mules could carry them, and the season was against our going to the top unprovided, we had to be content with going only higher than the lazy folks here say any one else has ever been since Cortés got sulphur for making gunpowder out of the crater of Popocatapetl.

'It is an odd thing to me, the interior life of these sailors. My friends have not the faintest conception of the meaning and prospects of the expedition which has brought them to Mexico; and they don't care to have any, save in so far as it may affect their chances of promotion and leave. I suspect they will be rather surprised when they know that I am here with a purpose beyond that of amusing myself and them, and see me bearding the British Minister in his den at Cocolapam.

'I won't entrust this letter with anything of importance, as it may miscarry. The return of the couriers from Europe is looked for with great anxiety. Neither our plenipo. nor the French one has yet betrayed any knowledge of what I told you. I can hardly think the President is mistaken, yet the scheme is the most preposterous ever imagined. It is difficult to believe that any man who is comfortable at home, as Archdukes are given to being, can be such an idiot. And what has France, or rather her ruler, to gain by it? It is a long price for a quiet life. Adios.'

Maynard's letter, which at length came, exhibited the utmost alarm at the prospect held out by the President. That prospect meant, it said, war to the knife against all foreigners, for the bulk of the people would never tolerate foreign interference in such form. The Liberals would rally round Juarez, much as they detested him, and the Americans would probably take advantage of the distraction to step in and aggravate the general anarchy. He begged Noel to press urgently upon the British Minister the views which they had already agreed upon, making it essential that Juarez should be kept in power, if the expedition was to result in anything but the total ruin of all foreign interests.

He concluded by saying that they all missed him very much, and hoped to see him back as soon as possible.

Margaret also wrote a few lines to the effect that his return would be a real kindness to James, who since the receipt of the news had shown extraordinary anxiety and talked more than ever of abandoning the country; but that she fancied he had some scheme in view which he kept in the background.

Her note was written in a fine and delicate hand, and, somehow, indicated to Noel a mind that dwelt upon the thought to be expressed, rather than upon the manner of its expression. There was not a word of affection in it; but Noel saw in its very reticence the proof of the firmness of her love far more than in the strongest protestations. 'No need,' he thought, 'to put words on paper when there is no doubt of constancy and truth. She writes with the calm confidence of one who knows herself and him whom she has trusted.'

He determined to lose no time in seeing the Minister and hastening back to Dolóres, whither the sight and touch of Margaret's note excited in him the utmost eagerness to return.

CHAPTER XXX.

Noel's first interview with the British Minister was interrupted by the arrival of the expected despatches from Europe on the purport of which the fate of the expedition, of Mexico,—and who can say of how many besides?—hung. But the con-

versation had lasted long enough to enable Noel to deeply impress the Minister with the importance of his representations, and to excite in him the most vivid curiosity as to the source of his information.

'You say,' observed Sir Charles, after they had talked together for some time, 'that you have been absent for some years from Europe, and have held no communication whatever with Paris. I should not be justified in telling you at this moment exactly how matters stand, but any hour may relieve me from necessity for farther secrecy, and then perhaps you also may feel yourself at liberty to speak freely. With regard to the views which you have expressed,—look at this pile of letters,—they are all from British and other foreign residents in Mexico; and they all, without exception, call for the permanent occupation of the country, and assumption of its government by the Allied Powers; and declare that, if we fail to do this, they must call upon the United States for protection—meaning thereby, conquest and annexation.

'Tell Lord Littmass from me, (for I recognise your friend as entitled to that appellation: it is an honoured name, and I trust that he will not long consider himself debarred from assuming it,) that he alone of all foreigners in Mexico has divined the true policy of the British Government, and the only possible one for the country; and that it will be a subject of congratulation to all free States if the indigenous races of Mexico, under the leadership of one of their own children, succeed in regenerating their country, and in gaining for it a place among the modern civilisations. I must not speak more definitively; but of this you may be assured, that the British Government has neither any ambition of its own to gratify, nor any disposition to further the ambition of others, especially at the expense of Mexico. I must dismiss you now. If you remain a little longer in the neighbourhood, I shall be happy to see you again.'

Noel took his leave, saying, that if the object of the Intervention really was to aid and not to supplant, it was essential for all parties that no time be lost in publishing the fact. Otherwise, only mischief would ensue.

The next few days were a time of great excitement and anxiety at Orizaba. Interminable conferences were held between the representatives of the various Powers. Couriers passed continually to and from the capital. Noel himself employed one to convey to the President a strong representation of the

necessity of his calling on the plenipotentiaries to disavow, openly, the rumours—rumours encouraged by the facility with which the English had allowed themselves to be cajoled into according the protection of their flag to the most notorious intriguers among the Mexican refugees from Paris—that they contemplated a hostile invasion of the country, and so to hasten the disavowal of any intention to subvert the government by force. The reply to his communication was brief, and to this effect:—

'*Gratias muchissimas.* I know all. Wait and watch.'

So Noel waited and watched; and the first intimation that the rupture, which grew daily more imminent between the Allies, was complete, consisted in an order to his naval friends to rejoin their ships. Assuming that the Minister would not be long in following them, he called to pay his final respects. Being admitted, he was greeted with a friendly admonition to get himself and his friends out of Mexico as soon as possible.

'Your information was correct, wherever it came from,' said Sir Charles; 'and had we possessed it soon enough, we should not have been here. Have you any reason for farther secrecy as to the source of your information?'

'It was Juarez himself,' replied Noel.

'Juarez has known all along that the French came here pledged to displace him, and establish an Austrian as Emperor in his room! and, knowing this, has treated us civilly and humanely!'

'He has known it from the first,' replied Noel.

'Then he is a noble fellow,' exclaimed the Minister, 'and I shall do my best to make amends for the folly with which our Government has fallen into the trap.'

He was as good as his word; and, in spite of all denials and remonstrances from the French Envoy, the British withdrew from Mexico, asserting the authority of the President, and even induced the Spaniards to do the same.

Noel saw Juarez on his return to Dolóres by way of the capital. The President greeted him most cordially; and, on Noel's expressing his regret at the part which the British Government had been betrayed into taking, he re-assured him as to the effect on the position of the English residents, and promised that, come what might—and it would probably be serious in no light degree—English interests at least should always have his protection; 'that is,' he added, with a melan-

choly smile, 'so long as I am in a position to protect anything.'

In the threatening position of affairs, troops could ill be spared; but the President insisted on providing Noel with an escort, and even offered to allow him to retain it at Dolóres, in case 'Don Maynardo' should deem such protection desirable.

So they parted; the young English gentleman to solve the hard problem of love and incompatible friendship, and the aboriginal Mexican ruler to wage war to the knife against the wily invaders of his country; and both to learn how important an element in the dispositions of Fate is individual character.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE period occupied by his return to Dolóres was, on the whole, one of weariness and depression to Noel. Had he possessed more of the youthful buoyancy proper to his age, and been less occupied by uneasy introvision or anxious anticipation, the peculiarity of the circumstances amid which his journey was performed would have stimulated and exhilarated him beyond measure. Honoured with the friendship of the first man in the government, entrusted with a political mission and secrets of the deepest importance, escorted by a special guard of honour, by whom he was treated with such deference that even their commander scarcely ventured to address him without being first spoken to; and in this state traversing the romantic table-lands which had witnessed the rise and fall of the ancient civilisation of the Aztecs, and the marvellous feats of their conqueror, Cortés, and his handful of heroes,—there was enough of novelty and singularity in all this to turn the head of any man who cared more for the externals of life than did Edmund Noel.

But Noel's sympathies with the realities of the external world were too keen to allow him to be deceived by its appearances into exulting over any good fortune that might befall himself. A little conversation on the first day of his journey had shown him that the leader of his escort was a mere mercenary, ignorant of the very meaning of patriotism, and ready any day to sell his services to the highest bidder. There was little satisfaction in talking with him; so Noel turned his attention to

the country through which he was riding, and speculated on the possibilities of its future.

His back was now toward the shining peaks, and for a long distance before him lay only rolling wastes with scarce a sign of habitation, save an occasional wretched Indian village, with its patch of green maize. A few thickets of ilex and dwarf oak scarcely varied the monotony. Cultivation and population were alike wanting. Even the wild cattle that might there find pasture in thousands, seemed to have shunned these solitudes as if appalled at their dreariness.

It was a relief to him when, on mounting the Sierra which incloses the plains of the capital, he could turn and bid adieu to the region ruined and cursed of man, but yet over which still shone afar the shining peaks as in hope, or in mockery of hope; and then descend into the fair and flourishing valley of Queretaro.

'England, at any rate,' he at length said to himself, 'has not, among all her conquests, any such degradation of people or destruction of country upon her conscience as Spain has of Mexico. The Anglo-Saxon at least repairs his ravages with something of a blessing; but the Latin——woe to the land that is colonised by Latin race, or religion! Is it race? Is it religion? Or is it character and circumstance that govern the fate alike of men and of nations? Individuals live, and suffer, and gain their reward, be it internal or external, according to the excellence of their aims and the persistency of their strivings. Surely it must be so with peoples! Otherwise, where is there hope for mankind?'

And the thought set him longing for Maynard to bear him company, and aid the course of his thoughts with his keen wit and far-reaching knowledge. Then his book, with which he had in vain attempted to make progress since he left Dolóres, recurred to him, and, thinking over his project of representing a single individual as the epitome of human history, he sought for a resemblance to the history of Mexico in man's own personality; and was content to fancy that he had found it when he remembered that not even the whole of a man has its perpetual uses, but that he parts with his hair, and his nails, and the refuse exhalations of his system for his general benefit and convenience. And if it be thus with the individual, how much more must the race be perpetually renewing itself by the rejection and loss of its refuse members? 'What is it that redeems and elevates

the individual man? Nought but his moral sense. And what the race of men? Surely, all history goes to prove that it is the respect paid to the moral sense of nations by themselves that alone insures continuance. Respect for one's own conscience is the sole elixir of continuity, as it is the sole end worth striving for, whether with the individual or with the race. Faithfulness to one's own highest best,—this is the sole faith that saves. But how came a handful of Spaniards to conquer Mexico? and what will save it in the crisis now approaching?'

And, glancing up at the heights and down at the chasms of the country through which his path lay, and scanning the thickets and natural fortresses with which it abounded, he thought of one, a patriot and an outcast in a far-off land, and long ago, who, after being hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, became a king and a shining name to all his people. And he wondered whether a new David would ever arise for the salvation of Mexico, and whether there was virtue enough in the peasant blood of the land to work out its own redemption.

And, as in his mind he ran over ancient history and legend, and mused on existing possibilities, the past and the future became confused and mingled in his reverie, until, suddenly starting from it, it seemed as if a prophetic vision had been vouchsafed to him. And when he arrived at Real de Dolóres, he was filled with an impulse to offer the aid of his whole fortune and abilities to Juarez, with him to struggle and, if need be, fight for the independence and regeneration of Mexico. Would he not thus be still on the same soil and under the same sky with Margaret, confirming her regard by the nobility and devotedness of his enthusiasm, perchance occasionally seeing her, but escaping the agonising embarrassment of being ever near and beholding her another's?

There were letters from England for him; but he did not open them until he had told his friends all his recent history, and the idea which had taken possession of him. To his surprise, James approved highly of it, and said that he also would enlist under Juarez, and save Mexico from the new tyranny of king and priest with which it was threatened. 'But first read your letters,' he said.

'Did you know of this?' asked Noel, after glancing through those which bore the handwriting of Mr Tresham and Sophia Bevan.

'That your uncle is ill, and desires your return? Yes, he writes to me to that effect.'

'Then how can both plans be possible?'

'It will be some time before matters come to a crisis here, and we can go and return in time to be of service.'

'We!' exclaimed Noel; catching Margaret's anxious look at the instant.

'Yes: Mexico will be no place for women and children if war breaks out. It is bad enough in peace. My plan is, that we take Margaret and the bairns home to stay with, or under the protection of, her aunt and cousin; satisfy your uncle with a sight of you, and then come back, either to carry on the money-making, or to serve with Juarez.'

'And what do you say to all this?' asked Noel, of Margaret.

'It is the first I have heard of it,' she replied. 'So far as the going home is concerned, I quite approve; but the coming back again! I shall hope for a re-consideration of that part of the scheme when we get to England.'

'Sophia writes even more pressingly than my uncle,' remarked Noel; 'and she has a knack of generally being in the right in practical matters. She thinks that I ought out of regard to him to return at once.'

'Then it is settled,' said Maynard. 'It won't take you long to pack up what you and the children want for the voyage, will it?' he asked of Margaret.

'We can soon be ready; but you have arrangements to make for managing the works in your absence.'

'Those are easily made,' said James, with an odd look, that did not escape either of his hearers, but which they were at a loss to interpret.

'You mean by shutting up the mine altogether?' asked Noel.

'No, not unless the country gets into such a state that the silver is safer below-ground. I have no fear of leaving things in the hands of my officers for a bit. Indeed, I have foreseen such an emergency, and have prepared against it; so that I shall be ready as soon as Margaret. It was with this view that I have delayed the convoy beyond the usual time. We will all go to the coast and embark together.'

'What is there behind?' asked Noel of Margaret, on James leaving the room.

'It has something to do with the old grievance,' she replied,

to blame such religion if it allows you the first, or sole, place in my adoration; and, without respect to persons, recognises but one goddess.'

'Ah, you make it very hard for me. What if your goddess, in seeking to justify her pretension to your lofty regards, were to stumble, and fall from her pedestal?'

'That is just what you must not attempt to do. Think of, consult nothing but your own true impulses, and leave me to read you thereby. If yours is a fallible and erring nature, I have indeed dreamed.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALL troubles past, present, or to come; all fatigues, inconveniences, and discomforts, were forgotten in the ecstasy of delight with which the homeward-bound party gazed upon the scene that lay before them.

During the progress of the cavalcade, if such a term be applicable to a train principally composed of mules, from *el Real de Dolóres* to the edge of the table-land, the scene had been obscured by mists, and the spirits, especially of Margaret and Noel, had felt the gloomy influence. The strangely varying demeanour of James, too, had troubled them. At one time he would be walking by her side, holding her bridle or her hand, and treating her with the tenderness and affection of one who was haunted by remorse for past unkindnesses, and was determined now to atone for them. At another, he would be away for hours together far in advance with the *condúcta*, and his return to them would be marked by moodiness and silence. And then, again, he would be chatting with Noel in the most animated manner on the topics suggested by the time or the place, as if he did not know what care or responsibility meant.

The ascent of the final sierra that interposed between them and the region of the *Huasteca*, so famed for its beauty, seemed to bring with it unusual equanimity to Maynard, and the evening passed on its summit was one long to be remembered. The convoy had gone down to some distance below the ridge for the sake of pasture for the animals, and Maynard and his party

encamped on the summit, whence they could behold, as it were, all the kingdoms of the earth; so far away, now that the veil of cloud was lifted, stretched the view before them.

Seeing Maynard busying himself in aiding Margaret to dismount (for Noel purposely kept aloof from paying her too much attention), lifting the children out of their panniers, and selecting the spots for the three little white tents that formed their nightly shelter, while the tinkling of the mule bells from the hill-side below faintly reached their ears, Noel was irresistibly reminded of the representations by the old painters of the flight into Egypt, and at the same time struck by the curious contrast between the legendary history and the actual one of the group before him. In the former, the credit of parentage being assigned entirely to the mother; and in the latter, the father claiming it all for himself. In the former, contented acquiescence in the divine decree; and in the latter, only bitterness and grief at the supposed defect of a nature deemed otherwise so perfectly excellent. Yet, if ever mother was virgin, surely none, it seemed to him, was ever more essentially so than Margaret!

The sun was setting behind them when all preparations for the night's encampment were finished, the evening meal taken, and nought remained but to gaze their fill upon the scene that stretched itself out below. Here and there a cloud still floated below them, its upper side lit up by the nearly level sun, and giving them the sensation of dwelling above in a firmament of their own. Away to the east, towards the invisible shores of the great gulf, stretched a succession of valleys covered with a sea of verdure, the like of which was unknown to the table-lands, and whose any spray or parasite would have been a prize for a northern conservatory. From far down the cliffs ascended the plashing sounds of innumerable cascades created or replenished by the rain of the day; and here and there in the distance, gleaming amid the foliage of the mahogany swamps, through which it wound, could be seen the river, at whose mouth lay their port of embarkation, the Panuco; now swollen with the rains, which, to Maynard's discomposure, had that season commenced earlier than was usual.

The contrast between the arid table-land through which their journey had hitherto lain, and the scene before them, served to enhance the present beauty for the gazers from the brink. A slight shiver on the part of Margaret, as the sun

sank and the mountain air became at once chilly, induced Noel to throw his *seráp*e over her, and prompted James to remark that it would be hot enough to-morrow, and during their ride through the *tierra caliente* to Tampico. 'Everything here,' he said, 'is in extremes. Nature had forgotten her general moderation when she made Mexico. Its scenery is either depressingly hideous or enchantingly lovely; its soil utterly worthless, or a very mine of wealth, either above or below the surface. We are frozen to-day up here: down yonder we shall be alternately roasted and stewed to-morrow. And as for the people, they have been so long bad that I suspect there must be a perfect millennium in store. Indeed, my principal ground of hope for Mexico is the blackness of the darkness that has so long enshrouded it. It is going to the bottom with such a thump that a rebound is almost inevitable—that is, provided it is elastic, and not brittle. If the French Emperor persists in forcing his mad scheme upon them, and the Mexicans have to fight in self-defence against a foreign foe, it will do them all the good in the world, provided only enough of them get killed. To do any good, the revolution must be thorough. Convert the *péons* into landowners, and there is a chance for Mexico. I very much doubt whether a transplanted race can long thrive here. Since the supply of fresh blood from the old country was cut off by the achievement of independence, the Spaniards have steadily declined in the whole of their colonies. If ever emigration from England to her colonies ceases, I suspect the same result will follow. The transplanted race will gradually become assimilated to the indigenous; and the aborigine, or his type, will regain the ascendancy. The world is a pendulum, and its history a series of actions and reactions.'

'Small hope for man in this pendulous theory of yours,' observed Noel, who saw that James's present philosophy was the offspring of a bitter mood.

'What hope does man want,' he asked, 'beyond the limits of his own life? People will go on living, and working, and dying, and liking to do so, without depending for their happiness on a comparison between remote periods of history.'

'Alas, for my continuous man, then!' said Noel. 'You would deprive my book of its hero.'

'Ah, I forgot your literary exigencies. No; stick to him, and let us see how you work it out. I am only afraid that when we all reach the stage of your contemplated perfection, it

will be a very dull world—almost as bad as the popular heaven. I suspect the truth is, that a spice of wickedness is necessary to our enjoyment. It at least allows room for hope, which is a blessed frame of mind, scarcely admissible in a state of perfection. Hope! I wonder what it feels like. Perhaps we shall find out when we come back to fight with Juarez for the regeneration of Mexico!'

'It is very cold,' said Margaret, shuddering, and rising to go to her tent. 'I am sure that if there is any sympathy between the feelings and the thermometer, Hope must be warm, and Despair somewhere near zero.'

James looked after her thoughtfully as she moved away, and then said,—

'Thus does woman's instinct surpass man's reason. It *is* cold; and I have been enunciating the philosophy of the iceberg. It will be too warm to-morrow. Pendulum again!'

Maynard was right. It was more than too warm next day when, after a tedious and slippery descent of many thousand feet, they made their first halt in the *tierra caliente*. Here, as if to make ample amends for the cold and barren heights, Nature seemed to revel in warmth and luxuriance. Henceforward to the coast their path lay among dense masses of tangled foliage, rich pastures, cultivated ground, and groves of palms. Here, instead of the stony or slimy track, broad, smooth, grassy rides, cut through the forest, invited to a gallop; and it was only by the fanning of an occasional canter that the suffocating heat could be for a moment mitigated. Maynard alone seemed to enjoy the excessive temperature.

'Ah,' said he to Noel, as they rode along, 'this kills you, though it just suits me. You want bracing airs to bring you up to the mark. Your very name indicates relaxation—all liquids and vowels. And a man's name is much more a part of himself than is generally supposed.'

When camped for the night, he should like, he said, to be a tree, and to be planted there, to grow, and put forth spreading roots and branches, and sustain creepers and parasites, and have bright-feathered birds singing among his leaves, and to be haunted by those magnificent big *mariposas* by which the children had been so delighted in the latter part of their ride. 'On the whole,' he added, 'I suspect the vegetable world has the best of it. At least, its members adapt themselves less painfully to

circumstances. It is difficult to fancy a tree crossed in love.'

'Do you hold that to be the greatest of misfortunes?' asked Noel, laughing.

'Whether it be so, or not, a man always fancies it to be so. Falling in love is the chief and crucial act of life, whereby man is distinguished from all lower—perhaps from all higher—animals. And to be thwarted in that is to be made to feel that he lives in vain. Place of all places is this for the topic. Climate of Paradise, and trees of Eden! With the very air is breathed love and delight; the voluptuousness of nature needs no prompting from wise serpent, once so eagerly and appropriately adored on pillar and tree; but the whole man is roused to imitate his Maker, and fulfil his creative functions. Of course I mean those who are human, and not— Where are you going, Margaret?'

'To open the children's tent. They must be too warm with the flaps so low down.'

'Poor child!' said James, when she had moved away. 'She can't bear the thought of the realities of nature. And she is often angry with herself for being, as she thinks, a disappointment to me. I cannot persuade her that I would rather be disappointed with her than satisfied with any other. I sometimes wish that she might fall in love, that she might understand things better. And then I dread her doing so, because I know how intense will be her remorse at the misery she will believe herself to have made me suffer. It is a marvellous heart, and I suspect it may be better for her never to get to the bottom of it—in this world, at least. The greatest happiness that can befall her will be to lose me, and have only to occupy herself with her children and her art-worship.'

'Her taste for the latter is indeed a part of her very nature,' observed Noel, somewhat at a loss what to say.

'A good deal more than the former,' returned James. 'And, therefore, as you have perhaps observed, I do not encourage her in it. Her tendency to the Abstract is almost a morbid one; and I fear the children will be ruined by it for all practical purposes of life. They will be brought up to object to men for being men and not angels. It is a sort of religiousness that has a charm for some imaginations in its eminent unpracticality. To me worship without love, work without an end, art without creation, are monstrosities. Such art or religion as hers, is a

mere reverie, an immoral sensationalism; inasmuch as it is divested of all relation to the concrete. Like the religion of monks and nuns, its end is self.'

'Surely, you do her injustice,' remonstrated Edmund. 'There is no slavish terror in her feeling, as is apt to be with them.'

'No, you are right there. But the result is the same, though the motives are as far apart as light and darkness. Contemplation divorced from action is as mischievous as action divorced from contemplation. Her very nature is an aspiration. My theory of differentiation does not apply to her, for in her the Divine thought has failed to culminate in a distinct individuality. Margaret has nothing to part with, no sea-change to suffer, in order to re-unite with the universal soul.' Then, after a pause, he added,—

'Poor child! it was a strange and hard trial to introduce her to the life of earth; and I cannot see that it was needed in her case: that is, supposing life to be a probation. And if an education, it has failed.'

'I wonder if I shall have a theory about my wife, if I ever have one!' said Noel, fascinated by any prospect of a revelation concerning Margaret, and yet half fearing to betray his interest.

'God forbid!' said Maynard, devoutly. 'Marry a woman that is wholly woman, when you are about it, or never marry at all. Better be born blind, and remain so, than open your eyes only to close them again.' And he muttered to himself words which Noel rather divined than heard.

'If ever you think me bitter in anything you have heard me say,' he resumed, 'pray remember that my bitterness was against fate, and not against individuals.'

'Is ever love without a spice of bitterness?' asked Noel. 'Perhaps something of the kind may be necessary to preserve it from cloying.'

'That is no reason why it should predominate over the sweet. But you have not expressed a young man's sentiment —and a bachelor's.'

'Very likely. But my own fear in a too happy love would be, lest familiarity and use degenerate into indifference.'

'Now, that is a frame of mind I cannot imagine,' said Maynard; 'though I am inclined to envy it.'

'It is not an uncommon one, I fancy, if the testimony of many be taken.'

'The testimony of many must be the testimony of the commonplace. It is unnecessary to argue from them. It would be fishing in stagnant waters.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE next day's ride was inexpressibly oppressive to all but Maynard, whose demeanour troubled Margaret and afforded a subject for much reflection to Noel. At times he seemed to be elate as a hero who has just achieved a great triumph; at others, he was moody and depressed. When camped for the night, Margaret retired as soon as possible after the evening meal. Noel, after a little conversation, said he should try to get some sleep early; whereupon James said that he would walk on to the *condúcta*, and ascertain if it was possible to reach the port by the next evening, his anxiety to do so being prompted by his wish to get them all on board ship out of that unhealthy region.

It was after some hours of uneasy sleep that Noel, catching sight of the stars shining through his tent's thin woof, and hearing the sighing of the refreshing breeze among the tree-tops, determined to turn out and enjoy the night-scene and air. He had lain down half dressed, and had only to throw his *serápe* over him to be ready. To his surprise, he found Margaret pacing uneasily up and down near the tents.

'I was wanting you,' she said. 'Tell me where James is.'

'Has he not returned yet?'

'No. And he has been so strange all day, that I am anxious.'

'He went forward, to speak with the officers of the *condúcta*. Depend upon it, he found the road so difficult that he has thought it better to stay and sleep there, than to return in the dark.'

As he spoke, he stumbled, but recovered himself without falling.

'You perceive how impossible it is to see the roots that

spread over the surface. I assure you that he is wise to wait for daylight. Have you had any sleep?'

'No. I have been too ill at ease in my mind to sleep. Finding he did not return, I thought I would ask you if there is any cause for alarm. But when I had come out, I could not bring myself to disturb you.'

'You see you have disturbed me, nevertheless. Surely, you do not suppose you could be lying there, or wandering here, restless and anxious, without my feeling it. I have had but broken snatches of sleep all the night, and only came out on feeling the irresistible magnetism of your wish. You must think of us not as two, but as one person.'

'Oh, how I wish we were!' she exclaimed, fervently.

'Thanks, darling, and forgive my selfishness in being made inexpressibly happy by knowing that you wish it.'

'No, no, I did not mean that. I was wrong—mad, to say so. I know not what I meant.'

'There is no room for self-reproach, I can assure you. That our sympathy is so perfect, is none of our doing. We but obey our true nature in following it. Come! you shiver in this night air, deliciously cool as it is after the day's seething. Let us sit here awhile, with this arching root for back, and I will throw my *seráp*e round you, while we inhale a little more of the sea-breeze. Another ten leagues, to-morrow, will bring us to the coast. This sort of experience makes one think what an unbearable world it would be, were there no more sea.'

'A world with no more sea of troubles?' said Margaret. 'I often think that, somehow, I must have lost my way, and come into this one by mistake. At least, I did think so until I found one whom I recognised, and who seemed to recognise me.'

They were reclining side by side on the turf, beneath a noble mahogany tree, leaning against a root that arched far over their heads, and turned and twisted along the ground to a distance beyond their feet, like a huge serpent too drowsy or secure to care for mischief or evasion. It was just discernible in the star-light, and suggested to Noel thoughts which he kept to himself. So far from proving a tempter, like its predecessor of conflicting memories, it only served to stimulate and fortify his moral sense.

'No, no,' he murmured to himself; 'we are no children to be deluded by subtleties, though we be sojourners in Eden,

and one, at least, of us be innocent as Eve herself. Surely man learns something in so many thousand years; or what is the meaning of humanity? Oh, my Margaret, the long results of time are not worthless if they have developed woman's heart and man's intellect beyond the world of mere self.'

She made no response, but seemed to lean somewhat more closely to him. Bending down over her, he found that she was fast asleep. The discovery made him intensely happy. He felt, in that supreme moment, that it was the highest compliment that had ever been paid to him. After years of troubled dreamings and wakings, she had at length found that for which her soul longed, and nestling to him had at once sunk into a deep, happy, peaceful slumber; best of all possible proofs of the genuineness of her waking feelings, and of the reality and depth of their mutual sympathy.

'For this to be,' he thought to himself, 'my nature must partake of the innocence of yours. Far from me, then, be any thought that can disturb your repose. For you would read it, and be agitated thereby. This is indeed the confidence of the perfect love where no fear is.'

And he pressed his arm round her the better to protect her with his *seráp*e against the night airs, which were not without a degree of moisture; and set himself to think all pure and lovely thoughts which might flit as guardian angels around her and fill her with happy dreams; and ever and anon he would seek to deepen her slumber by the resolute exercise of his will, believing that in the *rapport* of their sympathies he had such power to influence her.

Hour after hour passed, and still the spell worked. Now and then a murmur escaped her lips, indicating that she dreamt; and whenever Noel heard it, he renewed the effort of his will, and presently the slumber grew deeper. It was only by marking through the tree-tops the rapid shifting of the places of the glistening orbs that he judged the progress of the night. For in his state of ecstatic tranquillity all sense of time had vanished; and the current of his thoughts had settled down into an even rhythm, whereof the burden seemed to him to come in spontaneous flow, 'And so he giveth his beloved sleep.'

The mechanical regularity with which the sentence at length recurred, showed him that he, too, was on the point of falling asleep. This he had resolved not to do. He felt certain that Maynard would return with the earliest light, and he had

chosen his position so as to be able to watch for his approach along the vista that opened through the forest in the direction he had taken. Not that he intended to remain so long in that position. Dawn in those latitudes is rapidly followed by day; and he set himself to watch for other indications of its approach than those of light. The forest, as he had before learnt, always woke before the dawn. And now he could catch the sound as of birds turning in their feathery beds on the branches above him, and of unseen insects that began to tune betimes their shrill little whistles: even the leaves stirred as they had not stirred all the night; and soon a sound as of a general, but subdued, rustle pervaded the air, showing that creation felt the coming of its lord, the sun, and was stirred in its sleep even before his approach revealed itself to the senses of the watcher.

Gently withdrawing the arm which had been so long and so tenderly engaged, and detaching himself from his *seráp*e which he left carefully wrapped around the still slumbering Margaret, Noel withdrew to his tent; and throwing himself down was presently wrapt in unconsciousness. And heedless of the rapid dawn, and the loud discordant cries from the innumerable birds of brilliant plumage with which the woods were now alive; heedless of the notes of preparation around him for the day's march, he slept soundly until roused by the voice of Maynard telling him that if he wanted any breakfast before starting, he had better lose no time in coming to it.

The mules were already in waiting; the other tents had been struck and packed; Margaret had had her scolding for falling asleep under the tree, and nothing remained for Noel but to vacate his tent, make a hasty meal, and mount.

'Only fancy,' said James to him. 'This foolish child has passed the whole night in the open air, and only woke when she heard my step. Luckily she had borrowed your *seráp*e, or she would have had a chill and fever to a certainty.'

As Noel listened, Margaret cast a glance of grateful affection towards him, and then suddenly withdrew her eyes and broke into a suffusion of blushes, a complexion with which Noel had never seen her before. A 'rare pale Margaret' as she was by constitution alike of mind and body, the red current of her life lay far beneath the surface. And now for the first time it was forced sufficiently near to the crust to penetrate with burning heat the outer layer of snow. Even James was struck by the novelty of the apparition, for he exclaimed,—

'Margaret! how red you are! I shall not be astonished to find you have the fever already.'

'Oh, I think not,' she replied, in a tone of gentle gaiety. 'But come, let us get on our way without talking about me.'

Noel longed to hold some conversation with her, but during the whole day Maynard scarcely left her side. It was clear that her demeanour perplexed him as much as his troubled her. Indeed, she seemed to be conscious of a change in her own manner and aspect, for she said once that she had slept so soundly all night that she was scarcely awake yet. So Noel rode by the children, and pointed out to them the great bird-like butterflies, and the alligators basking on the edges of the lagoons, and helped them to look for monkeys up in the palm-trees; and so beguiled the way until they reached the pleasant little town which, standing on an acclivity opposite to Tampico, overlooked the harbour of their destination.

The steamer was expected to arrive in two or three days; so the next day was spent in resting in what, owing to its altitude, is certainly the healthiest spot in that region, while the treasure brought by the convoy was taken across the lagoon. Maynard was, as usual, always on the alert, taking part in every operation, and Noel, seeing that Margaret, through fatigue, or some other cause, was disinclined for conversation, kept near him, and watched with interest the details of his admirable organisation. That evening saw the whole of the treasure safely deposited in the custom-house at Tampico, and the next saw the whole party housed in the hotel, and ready for embarkation. Here, Noel was still more amazed by the incessant activity of Maynard. Trusting no detail, however petty, to others, he seemed to delight in making work for himself. And even after the steamer had arrived, and everybody and everything was on board, he sat up the greater part of the night writing, as if everything depended on his final instructions.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE steamer was to start at daylight with its precious cargo of metals, and still more precious cargo of the richest and best

that humanity knows or can imagine—true hearts, noble intellects, pure affections. The change from the rough hot ride to the smooth cool sea surface was felt as an inexpressible relief and delight by Margaret, as, leaning on Noel's arm, she paced the deck long after the sun had sunk, and the place of its light was supplied by the glistening orbs of the tropic night. Maynard was below in the saloon, writing, and now, in the first conversation Margaret had held alone with Noel since the night in the open air, she was telling him all that that night had taught her, and how that she seemed to have been in a dream ever since, a dream which showed her that she had never been awake until it came.

'Oh, Edmund, I know now what love is. I know what has been the depth of James's disappointment in me. I know what I can never be to you. My dream was more than I can tell or interpret. And you—you say you passed the night with your arm around me, and willed holy thoughts to come into my vision. Yes, I am sure you did, otherwise there could have been no peacefulness in my sleep. I should have started, and awoke, and left you, had I felt your heart to be other than it was. And after the revelations to me of the heights and depths of all human love, differing from and surpassing all that I had ever imagined, I dreamt on; dreamt that we were both in heaven, just so reclining on a lovely slope, with glorious landscape round, and sitting hand in hand, one arm round each, my head upon your shoulder, both perfectly glad, and both unconscious quite if 'twere eternity or time that sped. Only to be so, seemed enough for joy. I am sure it was not wrong, for *he* was there, near us, quick pacing up and down; awhile absorbed in thought, and then towards us glancing without a shade of shadow on his face; as if to say, "be happier now for all: for me, I feel through you." Oh, Edmund, could I but have died then!'

'Margaret, that is the whisper of despair. I live. Therefore, I have hope.'

'Think not my despair is all for myself. No; I believe that to him my memory will be a greater blessing than ever I have been. And to you; for, living, I do but stand in your way and come between you and your proper fate.'

'To me, at least, your death would be useless,' he replied, 'for having known you and been loved by you, I could never descend to a lower reality.'

'I sometimes think and fear,' she said, 'that I am not of

the dying kind, otherwise I should not have lasted until now.'

After a pause she added,—

'Can you explain to me the weight of dread that oppresses me about James? I may be very foolish and fanciful, but the feeling is irresistible that he is contemplating some step which he dares not tell me. What can it be?'

'Margaret, the conviction has forced itself on me that if he were certain that his death would bring you happiness, he would commit suicide rather than be a bar to it.'

'As if I would allow myself to benefit by such a sacrifice!' she exclaimed. 'No, he cannot wrong me so cruelly as to think that.'

'He may contrive it so as to appear an accident, as by falling overboard from this vessel. But it may be that only our fancies are speaking, and that he is merely occupied by necessary business.'

'I don't think you quite know James,' she returned. 'He is not one to relinquish me to another, however willing he might be to give me up himself. He has a sense of duty which would interfere with such a notion as you expressed just now; and I am not sure that he would not consider it his duty to adhere to me, if only by way of moral discipline, if he thought that I wished for a change. But now I must say good night. The coming days will show if there be any truth in our presentiments. How odd it is of him to insist on my taking my little Mexican maid with me. I could so well have managed the children by myself till we reach England, and then my dear old nurse will be so glad to help me.'

So Margaret went to her cabin, proffering a good night to James as she passed through the saloon where he was occupied. He glanced shortly at her, and nodded, and after she disappeared went on writing.

Noel remained on deck to smoke a cigarette and then went below, saying to Maynard that he hoped to be up in time to see them get under way.

Maynard rose, and grasping his hand firmly, said,—

'It is very good of you to look after Margaret for me. I sometimes think she really has found a brother in you. But however that may be, I trust and beg you will be as a brother to her should any trouble or emergency come; or if at any time I am not by to aid her. Good night, my dear fellow.'

Returning his grip Noel retired to his cabin, to ponder awhile over Maynard's words, and then to fall asleep.

As for Maynard, he wrote some time longer, and then approached Margaret's cabin. After holding the handle of the door for some moments as if irresolute, he opened it gently and went in. The sound woke her from the light sleep into which she had fallen, and she looked towards him.

'Margaret, darling,' he said, in a low strange tone of voice, 'I did not half say good night to you before, my thoughts were so occupied. Good night, darling. Good night. Good night. May all voyages be pleasant, all seas smooth for you, henceforward for ever.'

And he kissed her brow, and her hands, and her hair, but not her lips; and then left the cabin and went on deck, where she heard his quick familiar step pacing up and down, until, at length weary of conjecture, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AROUSED by the noise of the capstan, Noel started from his slumber and hastened to go on deck to take a last look at Mexico. On opening his cabin-door he was met by the steward, who was evidently waiting for him, and who said, handing him a letter,—

'If you please, sir, I had strict orders to give you this to read the moment you were up.'

Noel returned into his cabin, and opening the letter, which was in Maynard's handwriting, found a note for himself, and an enclosure addressed to Margaret. That to himself ran thus:—

'I cannot leave Mexico, and I dare not keep Margaret in it. She would not go without me; hence my device. You will see her safe to her aunt. Your friendship will not grudge this service. On receiving this you will best serve all parties by repressing any appearance of surprise, and persuading her to do the same. The captain of the steamer knows that I had no intention of going, and has no idea but that you and Margaret know it also. He believes that she is going to England under

the escort of her brother. The idea was suggested to me by the people at the Christmas games, calling you 'el señor hermano.' The supposed relationship will prevent any inconvenience or annoyance to either of you on board. Your preservation of the character is essential to the interest and honour of us all. To me it scarcely involves a falsehood; for are not all men brothers? and Margaret, as I too well know, is a born sister to all men.

'I ask your forgiveness for thus making use of you without first gaining your consent. Do not decide that I am wrong, until you can suggest a better expedient; and in your calculations do not omit to take some account of what it must have cost *me*. When this comes into your hands I shall be far away on my return to the *Real* with the *condúcta*, which has orders to wait for me. I stick to the mine until either it can do without me, or I without it. Bid Margaret be composed, and persuade her that I have done the best. She has a great opinion of you, and will be influenced by your advice. Farewell, until we meet again; and don't forget that I want to read your book.'

Noel read this letter over a second time before he allowed any decided feeling to form itself in his mind; and then found compassion and resentment struggling with about equal force to get uppermost. Going on deck and inquiring with as unconcerned a manner as he could adopt, at what hour James had gone ashore, he learnt that he had not returned to Tampico at all, but had left the steamer in a boat with some of his own men long before daylight, and had gone across the lagoon to rejoin the convoy. He had thus put himself out of the reach of remonstrance and repentance, and it only remained for Noel to wonder how Margaret would take the news, and how he could best break it to her. He found it very difficult to realise the fact.

'Margaret given up to me, and on such terms! How I should have caught at the chance, had I been consulted. And now, the false position in which she is placed is almost enough to make her hate me. How clever of Maynard is that idea of *brother*. Could he have guessed the keenness of the sarcasm? I have sometimes fancied that there is a certain fiendish element in his nature, which would impel him to any cruelty where his affections are nearly touched. I never realised before what heaping coals of fire on an enemy's head meant. The first feeling, with any other woman in the world, would be one of

bitter indignation at being so compromised: indignation strong enough to impel to vengeance,—the vengeance, perhaps, that a wife alone can take. But the idea will not occur to Margaret, and I certainly shall not suggest it to her. Blessed, worldly ignorance! May it continue until—until we meet Sophia Bevan! Ah!' and he started as if stung, 'I must be beforehand with her, and tell her just so much truth as to let her think the arrangement, an unusual one, certainly, but not appearing very odd to ourselves under the circumstances; and, therefore, not requiring any very strong expressions of astonishment or disapprobation; at least, before Margaret. No, Sophia is a thoroughly good girl, and will, I am sure, agree with me that the only way to spare Margaret—to say nothing of myself—much pain and annoyance is to take the arrangement as a matter of course. She is so sharp that it will be a difficult matter to keep her in the dark as to our real feelings. Perhaps the practice of brothering-and-sistering each other during the voyage will help to blind her. Lady Bevan may think, but she won't talk; and by a little management may be made to see things in a satisfactory light. If we can but keep our own secret until we reach England, all may go well. I trust to heaven no passengers who know either of us will join us in the West Indies.'

And taking out Maynard's letter he read it again, and then watched the receding shore, and the sinking line of the forests, and, golden tinted in the level sun, the white houses of *Tampico el alto*, the elevated village on the opposite side to which James had gone direct in order to rejoin his people, and which remained visible long after the town and the port had disappeared. And then he went below, and wrote this note to be given to Margaret on her waking:—

'Sister Margaret,—For such, by James's desire, is to be your title during the voyage; the enclosed will show you at once the worst and the best that we had to fear or hope from the peculiarity of his demeanour. Read first the letter addressed to me. I was up at daylight, and found that he had gone hours before to rejoin the convoy, and was far out of reach. While waiting for your waking, I have been thinking for both of us. It cannot be undone. We may condole with each other in secret—his arrangement at least gives us that privilege: and I need not assure you that, while I am utterly innocent of any knowledge, suspicion, or approval, of his design, I shall not the less to my utmost aid you in bearing this painful surprise, and

fulfilling the part he has assigned to us. Poor, dear fellow, my heart bleeds for him. What will sustain him when the excitement of carrying his stratagem into effect shall have passed away? Perhaps you had better not leave your cabin to-day, or, at least, before evening, when your brother's arm will be at your service for a turn upon deck. If you wish to speak with me before that, send for me to your cabin. The greatest kindness we can do to James now, to say nothing of ourselves, is to attend to his wish,—keep the secret and enact the parts. In all sympathy, your affectionate brother, EDMUND.'

Margaret scarcely knew what she had read when she reached the end. Yet she started up, and gazed through the windows of her port at the now distant shore, and saw that all return was hopeless. And then she read James's letter to Edmund; and then with frozen fingers opened her own.

'Oh, my Margaret,' it said, 'let this atone. If there were a choice for me, at this last moment, I would gladly accept it, rather than lose the sweet irritation of your presence. I dare not keep you longer in Mexico, even if I dare keep you longer by my side. You will be angry and hurt at my decision at first, for a little while, and then you will be sorry for me, and have anxiety on my account. Be as sorry as you can, and I shall bless your compassion; but have no fears. Alone, I am not in danger. Don't let Noel come back. He has better occupation in Europe; and, with his ambition, stimulated by you, he will find there a fitting career. Make him get married. He will do little until he is. Go, and live happily with your relatives, and send me a line now and then to say that you are well. But not often. I cannot bear it. You know in your most inmost soul that we are best apart, at least for the present. Perhaps sometime in the future, you—no, I dare not let myself dream. You cannot change to me, or for me. Do not think I blame you. The mistake was mine. I read human nature awrong. I did not know that such love as mine could fail to create a love like itself. Perhaps I ought to have known that such loveliness as yours could not be altogether human. See how noble I believe you! I knew you would not leave me, and so contrived this plan. It meets all objections, save that which your heart will prompt when it is too late. While reading this, you are longing to be with me, as you never longed before. But to what end should I go with you, if only to return? Never mind; that longing is my best justification, and reward. It

proves that I have at last learnt to comprehend you. Tell them what you please in England. Farewell, oh, my love!'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MARGARET'S first impulse was to implore the captain to put back, in order that she might send messengers after James. Then she commenced to blame herself for not having detected his intention. She recounted to herself every peculiarity of his demeanour since the first announcement of their departure; particularly the unusual tenderness of his manner on the journey, and, above all, his mode of taking leave of her on the previous night. These things, seen in the light of the present fact, made all so clear to her, that she inveighed bitterly against her own blindness in not seeing them before, and led her to inflict on herself fierce self-reproach for having, as she fancied, allowed herself to be so pre-occupied by her own feelings and emotions as to allow all else to escape unnoticed.

It was long before this last sentiment ceased to predominate in her mind, as was natural to one whose disposition it was ever to seek within her own self for the origin of every evil that occurred in connection with her. Mingled with this feeling, however, was one of anger with James, for the liberty he had taken in putting such a burden upon Edmund without first asking his leave. And how could he know that such an assignment of her to Noel's protection would not be most unwelcome to herself? This last thought produced an involuntary smile; and that smile, when she became conscious of it, broke up her reverie, and restored her to active practical thought. Her husband gone, her duty lay now with her children. Summoning her maid, she bade her make up a berth for one of the children in her own cabin, as she intended to have one always with her during the passage. The girl, a warm-hearted little *mestiza*, with sallow skin and dark eyes, assured her mistress that she could very well take care of both, and that it would disturb *el Señor* to have a child in his cabin. Her eyes opened very wide when told that *el Señor* was not coming, and had returned to the *Real*, and that *el*

señor hermano would see them safe home; and then she set herself to make the required changes. The movement of the vessel, however, proved too much for the poor little body, and she was forced to retire, leaving Margaret to do it all herself. Noel, peeping into the corridor, saw the maid sitting in an attitude of despair, and the little girls standing by gazing wonderingly upon her, and then he saw Margaret passing rapidly from one cabin to the other. Whereupon, perceiving the position of affairs, he advanced to the children, and taking a hand of each, said in a loud and cheerful voice, 'Come up-stairs with uncle, and see the pretty waves,' and so carried them off until breakfast time, when, the maid being still out of the question, he sent them into their mother's cabin, telling them to be sure and make mamma have some breakfast herself. In the afternoon he received a little note from her, thanking him for his thoughtfulness, and saying that she would try to get on deck in the evening, when the children were asleep.

In the evening they met. Her manner was intensely calm. In the most matter-of-course way, she took his arm for a walk, and after a few turns in silence, they sat down. Neither of them had spoken yet, and in the beauty of the tropic night, and the weird strangeness of the position and the scene, each felt that silence was more expressive than words. At length Margaret drew a long sigh, and said, as if to herself,—

'What poor fools we mortals are. So thin a veil between us and reality, and all our senses are incapable of piercing it. It seems so easy now to have perceived and prevented James's intention, and to have escaped the bitter punishment due to my blindness. For the first time in my life I shrink from that future state, where we shall have to look back in the spirit and see how very little more knowledge would have kept us from the mistakes of our lives.'

'Life without mistakes! What would become of our education? Ah Margaret! James was right when he said you were not meant for this world; and you stumbled upon the truth the other night when you said you had lost your way and come here by mistake. To me, it is a comfort to think that you were not deemed quite perfect enough to dispense with this world as a sort of finishing school. It quite accords with his theories about love in life. You left heaven to learn that. I suspect that when once you have learnt your lesson you will not be sent back hither again. So I must make the most of you here; and when

we meet there, you must condescend from your high sphere and help me.'

'You have a right to be bitter,' she said. 'You cannot feel it more than I do.'

'Margaret, you know in your heart that nothing is farther from my mind in respect to you than bitterness. I forgive you speaking thus, because I know how deeply wounded you are by what has taken place. I am willing to serve as an altar of atonement for all your imaginary sins, and to let you vent all your grief upon me; but I would also aid you to avoid any room for after self-reproach for your injustice.'

'Yes, yes, I am wrong, I know, and you are too good to me. But really I cannot help thinking sometimes that stupidity is the greatest of sins. And I am so stupid. At least, I was, until that night— Oh Edmund! I doubt if it was real kindness to remove the veil so far, and reveal to me the sweetness possible to life.'

'We do not read that the women of old repined when visited by a god in their sleep! But, seriously, you are hardly one to repent of the opening of any avenue to knowledge on account of any personal regret it may cause you. Blaming your own ignorance of life and its meaning, you yet hesitate to learn from me. Surely, placed as we are, such delight is not forbidden to us as comes

> "When one that loves and knows not, reaps
> A truth from one that loves and knows." '

Margaret could not help laughing at this unexpected application of a favourite passage; but presently her sadness returned, though with less intensity, and she said,—

'What will James do without me? At first he will, I know, encourage the most absorbing excitement, and work incessantly to avoid thinking, and scarcely allow himself even to eat or sleep. But when he is worn out, and the inevitable collapse comes— Oh, I dread to think of what may happen!'

'There is one thing that gives as much room for hope as for anxiety,' returned Noel, 'and that is, the state of the country. If the worst prognostics are to be realised, life in Mexico will not be the tame routine it has hitherto been. James's sympathies are so strong that he is pretty sure to become embroiled in political, if not in active, conflict, and the interest of the struggle will help to keep him from despondency.'

'God grant it may,' she said fervently, 'but still, moments

will come when he will be almost beside himself. I alone know how really dependent he is. He has more than once allowed that I am the stronger of the two.'

'In a complimentary sense?'

'Not invariably, for he sometimes said it was the strength of death as opposed to the feebleness of life: the power of not feeling, as of the granite hill against the beating storm. I am sure I have often longed for such a power. The hill need well be granite to endure the constant fretting of the elements.'

'My poor Margaret! and you were not granite, but felt intensely all the time. Felt doubly, too; for him, as well as for yourself. I suppose he forgot that even the mountain must at last succumb to the seasons. How strange and unwonted will this rest appear to you when the first anxiety is over.'

'It will scarcely be rest when my mind is ever with him. How dreadful will be his letters! And he tells me not to write, as he will not be able to endure mine. An occasional line to say I am alive and well: no more.'

'I can well understand his feelings in that respect,' said Noel. 'It indicates the difference between the mutual, and the unreciprocal yet ardent, love. For myself, I am only too glad to have all I may from you. But had I held the same relation to you that he has, I suspect that I should find no compromise possible between the all and the none.'

'You are so different,' said Margaret, sighing, 'that I cannot conceive his fate yours under any circumstances.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE impossibility of undoing what had been done, or of in any way influencing the main event, led Margaret and Noel soon to accept the situation without farther expression of regret. Margaret herself was the first to suggest to Noel the advisability of turning the interval to good account by getting on with his book.

'No one ever works during a voyage,' he said, unwilling to withdraw himself from the contemplation of his position, and

the delight it afforded him of unrestricted intercourse with Margaret.

'But why not?' she inquired. 'Is not time as valuable at sea as on land?'

'There is no time at sea,' he said. 'It is eternity, an element that never changes. Besides, without friction of contact with the world, there is no impulse to advance.'

'But I wish you to do it,' she said gently. 'It will not only add much to the passing interest of the voyage, but it will make you look back upon it as time not altogether wasted.'

'Wasted time when I am with you!' he exclaimed. 'Why, Margaret, what are you saying or thinking?'

'Ah, you may fancy so now,' she replied: 'but a time may come when you will think differently; and I would not have the reproach upon me of wasted time, as well as of wasted affection.'

'A true Enid, and better angel to your love always! Well, I will try to fulfil your bidding, though to me it will be rather like wasting time than using it. Pray do you suppose that, when you return to your native heaven, you will care to neglect its high bliss, and occupy yourself with playthings?'

'Never mind. I am not there now.'

'I am,' he said softly; and she continued,—

'If you will write, you shall read it over to me each day, and I will play critic to the best of my ability, if that will please you.'

So Noel devoted the rest of the voyage to continuing the book which had formed the subject of so many conversations between him and Maynard; and when the rough weather that arose on their approach to British latitudes put farther writing out of the question, and he was at leisure to read over his manuscript, he was amazed at the progress he had made, and at the brilliancy, depth, and tenderness of the matter; and eagerly acknowledged to Margaret his conviction that the book was far more hers than his, for that not only had the impulse to write come from her, but all the inspiration was hers also.

'A child of our united intellects and hearts,' he said with a sigh of mingled rapture and regret. 'I wonder if James really had the better part.'

'Hush, hush,' she said, in a decided yet gentle tone; 'I cannot bear it.'

And he, seeing that her love was truly and entirely his, and

that it took all her strength to be conqueror in the struggle, forbore to press upon the narrow dividing ground which lies between the rights and the duties of the affections, between the 'sinner' and the 'saint.' And Margaret's love was, if possible, strengthened and confirmed by her gratitude for his consideration; and he, comprehending all, felt that he was not unrewarded.

'Oh, that this could last for ever,' she exclaimed, when told of the near termination of their voyage. 'But I must not repine. I have been happier than I ever expected to be, or thought possible to any one. Henceforth, I shall always think of eternity as a fair voyage on a bright warm sea, with no weary land, but just so much as to make picturesque islets to be touched and gazed at, like those beautiful fairy isles of the West Indies, and then on again into the blissful void.'

'With no troublesome fellow-passengers, and just my arm to lean upon?' added Noel, pressing her hand to his side, for they were standing on the deck watching the sunset.

In every respect had they been fortunate. It was a season at which there were but few passengers; and none were such as to cause the slightest annoyance or anxiety to Noel. Some had come from Vera Cruz in the corresponding steamer, and joined them at Jamaica, and with these Noel held conversation about the prospects of Mexico and the consequences of the French policy. The same steamer had also brought his baggage, which had been so long waiting for him, and for which he had despatched orders on his return to Dolóres. This enabled him to amuse Margaret's little girls by showing them the various curiosities he had collected in his travels, and decking them out with quaint barbaric adornments. There was nothing in his manner or in that of Margaret to suggest the relations in which they stood, or did not stand, to each other, and it was a comfort to her to hear that others considered it a wise step on the part of Maynard to send his family home until quieter times, and to be told that she was fortunate in having a brother at hand to escort her.

Thus all had gone well; and when they steamed past the Isle of Wight, and up Southampton Water, the English sky, and the foliage glistening with the green of the young summer, seemed to recall them as from a dream to encounter the realities of waking life.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

To Noel's surprise, the steamer had hardly reached the wharf when he heard his name pronounced; and a packet of letters was placed in his hand by the Royal Mail Company's agent. Glancing at the covers to see the handwriting, and drawing a happy augury from the absence of any black edges, he thrust them into his pocket, and sent on shore to secure rooms at an hotel for himself and Margaret.

Refusing to abdicate his fraternal protectorate until absolutely obliged to do so, he engaged one sitting-room for himself and his charge, and made Margaret and the little ones dine with him in the evening of their landing. In the mean time he had read his letters; and when he found himself alone with Margaret in the evening, and had exacted what he called 'just one kiss for having brought her safe so far,' he added, in a joyous tone,—

'And I believe our widowhood need not begin just yet; for my uncle has gone to Italy for his health, and your aunt and Sophia have gone to take care of him! Linnwood is shut up; the house in town is let; and you have nobody but me, and no home but mine, at my uncle's, in England. I am sorry for you, darling; but for me it is so jolly! I shan't order shroud or hat-band just yet.'

'Why,' said Margaret, amazed and perplexed, 'what do you mean to do with me?'

'See you safe to Italy, dear one; make the journey as long and as pleasant as I can: and at length deliver you up safe to your friends, according to James's orders. Oh, if you could only manage to fall ill by the way, or if one of the children would do so, it will do just as well—— No, I should prefer to nurse you. I owe you that, you know, for nursing me. Really, I shall begin to think that Providence is on our side.'

'But your uncle,' said Margaret, troubled at the unexpected intelligence, yet unable to avoid being amused at Noel's sudden access of spirits,—'is he not very ill, then?'

'He was very ill in the spring, but got abroad in time to benefit by change of climate. I am so glad to find he has such cheerful companionship. If good spirits be catching, Sophia will be the best of doctors to him. It does not appear that he has married either of them yet.'

'They never thought of my coming,' said Margaret. 'How astonished they will be! I wonder what they will say!'

'Sophia will be so delighted to have your children about her, that she would welcome you for that, if for nothing else. To use her own terms, she adores and devours babies.'

'Then if she blames me for leaving James, she will forgive me for their sake. You still think it best to say nothing about James having acted as he has done?'

'I think I should be governed by circumstances. Most women tell everything to other women as a matter of course. It is something to talk about. But you are not of that sort, and can tell and retain as much as you please. If they are disposed to blame you, say that if they comprehended the circumstances, they would see that you had no choice. And if they—I mean Sophia; for Lady Bevan is never in haste to decide about other people's conduct,—if Sophia says you ought to have made James come too, you can suggest that she will be a better judge of such matters when she has a husband of her own. Or I will say it for you, if I am present. It seems to me important to avoid saying anything to confirm the idea which my uncle, probably instigated by her, had of James being in an excitable state of mind, and liable to break down under his responsibilities. I think the principal difficulty will be to satisfy Sophia about our coming in the same steamer. With all her vivacity of manner, she has certain conventional notions which are apt to be highly inconvenient and disagreeable at times. And she is not backward in propounding them for the benefit of her friends. No; our best and indeed only way to save all parties from unnecessary discussion, is to treat the whole arrangement as a matter of course, represent that James will follow as soon as he can put affairs in a satisfactory train for going on without him, and that, as I was coming home on account of my uncle's illness, nothing could be more natural than that he should be glad to send you by a vessel in which there was some one who took an interest in you, and would be likely to be of use; rather than to wait, at much inconvenience, for another, solely in order to send you by yourself.'

'I wonder,' said Margaret, 'where my old nurse, Dame Partridge, is?'

'Probably in charge of Linnwood.'

'Then I will write, and ascertain; and if she is in England I will either go and stay at Linnwood, or ask her to accompany

he proposed by the way. The presence of the dame, so far from annoying Edmund by proving a restraint, was of the greatest service, inasmuch as it enabled him to enjoy far greater liberty of intercourse with Margaret than he would otherwise have deemed advisable. She was such an admirable old woman, too; so cheerful with the little ones, and so attentive to every little need; so unobtrusive and uninquisitive, and with such a pleasant way of taking it for granted that whatever they did was natural and right and becoming, and the best and only thing to be done.

If she had at first been disposed to fear that the separation between James and Margaret might have had its origin in any incongruity of disposition, the notion was early dispelled by observing the habit of assent and compliance which pervaded all Margaret's relations with Noel. And she only thought how well the marriage had turned out which was productive of the growth of such a friendly and sympathetic disposition.

The drive from Nice to Genoa, in an open carriage, along the Riviera, was one of continual delight, the fineness of the weather allowing the scenery of land and sea to be displayed in all its most exquisite colouring. At Genoa they learnt that orders had been given, at least a fortnight back, to forward letters for Mr Tresham to Florence. So, after a visit to whatever was worth seeing in Genoa, they proceeded by steamer to Leghorn, and thence by railway to Florence. Arrived there, Noel had the satisfaction of finding that he had not yet to yield the custody of his cherished ward; inasmuch as the fugitives had, after a brief sojourn in Florence, returned to Leghorn, and taken their departure by sea for Naples.

Noel went back to his hotel, after obtaining this information, radiant with delight, crying,—

'A reprieve! a reprieve! After all these fatigues of locomotion you must have a week's rest, see Florence, and then on to Napoli la bella. And in the mean time we will save appearances by writing, and waiting for answers.'

In Florence, during the season of flowers, nature and art are serious rivals to each other. Margaret and Noel divided their days between the indoor and outdoor attractions of the place. The mornings were given to the galleries and the churches; the evenings to pleasant walks and drives, and note-making of things seen, said, and done. The week in Florence flew by only too rapidly. In every phase and aspect Noel found Margaret perfect. The good dame, too, was delighted to see her young mis-

tress once more the enthusiast of the studios and galleries as of old in Rome with 'Mr James.' And the development that had taken place in her circumstances and character in the mean time, gave a fitness of appreciation and understanding that left nothing to be desired by her companion.

It was a new revelation to Noel of the capacity of a really pure and elevated woman to be a companion to a man, to find that they could together visit and criticise objects which he had ever before shunned in the presence of ladies. The glories of Florence were new to her, though not to him. Yet she gave him a deeper insight into many things than he had ever before dreamt of. Above all, when, after gazing for some moments upon the famous Venus di Medici, she turned away murmuring,—

'No; that is not the attitude either of purity or modesty. It is too self-conscious.'

And Noel, overhearing her reflection, treasured it up for his own guidance against the time when he should carry out his design of representing his ideal of female beauty. For he still clung to his old passion for sculpture; and after Margaret rose upon him, the rays of beauty, physical and spiritual, which flowed from her form and her character, constituted for him the one standard of excellence, and dominated evermore his views of life and dreams of art.

The more Noel and Margaret visited the galleries and studied the representations of loveliness, with which the masters, old and new, have illumined them, the more did Noel become impressed with a sense of the necessity for his fulfilling his long-meditated task, or rather mission, for such it appeared to his enthusiasm.

'There are two classes of people in particular who visit great picture galleries and libraries,' he observed to Margaret, as they were resting one day in the Uffizii; 'those who are oppressed by the number of the books already written, or the number of the pictures already painted, and those who hold all that has already been done as of little account, because it fails to realise for them the ideal for which they crave.'

'I wonder,' said Margaret, 'in how many instances the authors themselves have been satisfied with their own work. Was it because Andrea del Sarto was satisfied, or because he was dissatisfied, with his success in painting his pretty wife, that he painted her so often?'

'Ah! that is a problem to be solved only by means of a chronological arrangement of his works. The most probable conclusion is, that, though at first proud of her beauty, he became dissatisfied with the low moral and intellectual character of the type, and then, for the sake of a quiet life, accepted the situation, and let himself down to her level.'

'Oh, Edmund! never be tempted to do that in any work you undertake. Aim ever at your highest, no matter what personal inconvenience it may bring.'

'You don't think, that, supposing such to be a true account of the painter's history, he exercised a loftier heroism in suppressing his own nature in order to keep down alongside of her to whom he was bound? Yet, if self-sacrifice be the highest virtue, what sacrifice can be greater than that which involves an abandonment of one's own ideal of life or conduct? What can be a greater virtue than such abnegation of virtue?'

'Once, I should have said,' replied Margaret, 'what are actual people as compared with one's ideal: what are circumstances in comparison with principles? But since I have married, things have seemed to alter.'

'You coincide at heart,' said Noel, 'with the opinion that an artist has no right to have any other wife than his art. Well, a great many have not. They content themselves with less settled relations; hoping to retain their liberty of ascent to higher ideals. Or would you debar them from love altogether?'

'No, no; let them be men, and have all the hopes, and fears, and joys, and sorrows, too, of humanity, even beyond other men. The individuality of genius is more sacred than all conventions. And surely it is no mean compensation to a woman to have inspired one work of art that shall perpetuate a beauty to distant ages. What can it matter to her what becomes of her poor self, if she knows the world to be the richer by one gleam of beauty, or one warm tone for her having lived or suffered?'

'There speaks the true artist-soul,' exclaimed Noel: 'self nothing, art everything. You would go heart and soul with the heroine that Florence and George Eliot have lately given to the world. Yet I have not the least doubt that nearly every other young lady who has read the story is only angry with Romola for not putting up with her husband, no matter what he was, after she was once married.'

'At least I should have tried to make him better,' returned Margaret. 'But I can't quite forgive Romola for being so mis-

taken in his character in the first instance. However beautiful Tito was, there must have been a narrowness in his brow, or a flatness in his head; a want of steadfastness in his eye, or a shiftiness and insincerity in his speech, which indicated his real character. No, I think the artist, great and noble as Romola is made, has endowed her with scarcely sufficient instinct to be in keeping with the rest of her woman's nature.'

'I suppose,' said Noel, 'that proportion is the supreme essential of art. Certainly the want of it vitiates everything. Perhaps the author meant to imply that a woman can develop intellect only at the expense of her instincts. Now, if you are rested, let us continue our inspection. I have not yet found the Madonna I am looking for; and I begin to feel sure that Raffaelle had no Margaret for his Mary. Though his painting improved, certainly the type of his Madonnas degenerated after he came to Florence. His ideal became lowered by contact with the real which he found in this worldly city. Would, however, that he were here now!'

Margaret laughed merrily at his enthusiasm for her beauty, and it made her very happy to be able to give him so much pleasure by its means. It was no new experience of hers to overhear herself likened to the Madonna. In Rome, in Mexico, and now in Florence, it was the same; and only on the previous evening, as she walked with Noel up to San Miniato to gaze upon the fair city, and watch the fireflies gleaming among the olives, she had been startled by the earnest adjurations of an old, half-crazy peasant who insisted on her identity with the Holy Mother herself.

Noel inferred from this universality of the impression that expression is a 'constant quantity' in the human face, a universal language everywhere similarly understood and interpreted. Mentioning this to Margaret, she told him that James had in one of his bitter moods turned the resemblance ascribed into a charge against her. 'It is nothing to be proud of,' he had said, 'that people can in your very looks read maternity without love.'

The history of Savonarola had derived a fresh interest for Noel and Margaret from the story of Romola; which they had obtained in the West Indies, and read together during the voyage; and they made a point of visiting the scene of his death.

'The most curious thing about him,' Noel told Margaret, 'is the parallel that has been drawn between his career and that

of Christ. I have heard it suggested by a clergyman, who was, however, considered more learned than orthodox, that it was not only in his earnest desire to reform the Church and regenerate his country that Savonarola resembled Jesus; but also in his being so convinced that he was immediately actuated by Deity as to believe that, brave the constituted authorities as he might, a miracle would be worked for his deliverance at the last moment; and that the cry of despair "Why hast thou forsaken me?" which proceeded alike from both at the moment of execution, was but the natural expression of anguish at the discovery of the deceptive nature of the hopes which had impelled and sustained them.'

'I do not think much,' replied Margaret, 'of the heroism that confides in a superior power for deliverance in the supreme moment of trial, however much I may admire the faith. Savonarola would have seemed greater to me had he gone on steadily contending for his ideal of duty, without such regard to his own fate in this world, as is indicated by his expectation and hope of a divine interposition. The most human often seems to me the most divine.'

CHAPTER XL.

THE week in Florence had extended itself to ten days, when the expected letters arrived. It was an equal shock to both Margaret and Edmund to be recalled to the realities of their position by the sight of the hand-writing of those to whom they were bound by ties whether of friendship or blood. They had been so long all the world to each other, with their constant and intimate interchange of thoughts and feelings, and none to come between and restrain their mutual revelation of each to the other.

Margaret had by degrees passed out of her intense quietism, and advanced half-way towards the position from which Noel surveyed the world; and she felt that it would be her greatest happiness, next to satisfying his longing with the impossible gift of herself, to stimulate and purify the ambition which was a part of his nature. For Noel was ambitious. He felt that

he had powers within himself which he could use for immense good, could he but determine upon a direction in which to bend them. His ambition was of a selfish kind, doubtless, but not in the usual and bad sense of the term. It was 'selfish,' inasmuch as it had its basis and impulse in his own disposition and temperament; and he declined to expend himself on anything which, being in imperfect harmony with his nature, he felt he would not be able to do so well as something else that accorded with him better. He thus regarded native *bias* as constituting the only call which a man is entitled to reckon as divine.

Noel's favourite idea of greatness was to remain in obscurity, and by force of intellect to direct people and events to the end he deemed good. He disliked the idea of personal distinction, and the troublesome recognition of the multitude; but he regretted his failure to embark on any definite career, by which he might operate on mankind unseen. He would have given much to know certainly his special and peculiar bent. But, hitherto, existence with him had been a longing rather than an endeavour. His love of moral harmony made him long to 'loose some music o'er the world' that might overpower all prevailing discords whatever. His love of beauty prompted him to achieve some work, whether by chisel or by pen, that would reveal to people a beauty to be obtained only by beauty of character, and stimulate to all goodness and truth. His love of justice and freedom made him eager to strike some great and ancient wrong from its seat, and live in the memory of mankind as a deliverer and benefactor.

Thus, it is no wonder that his love for Margaret, intensified and stimulated by the very necessity for its repression from love's natural course and fulfilment, should combine, with the glories of art amid which they daily lived and moved, to make beauty seem to him the one thing needful, the be all and end all of existence.

'Oh Margaret, Margaret!' he exclaimed, as they emerged one day from a studio which they had come to prefer to any other in Florence,—for was it not the studio of Fede, the designer and maker of the 'Italia' and the 'Polyxena'?—'had I but such a model as I have dreamed of, I would spend my life but I would make my ideal an imperishable reality.' And she, divining the unspoken mystery of his longing, yearned to gratify him by any abandonment, provided it could be at her own sole cost.

The expected letters were dated from Capri. Mr Tresham,

it appeared, had been more seriously ill than Edmund had any idea of, and it was even intimated by Sophia that he had had something very like a stroke of paralysis. But he was now better; and, in one of their excursions from Naples, had taken such a fancy to Capri that they determined to pass the summer there. The rest of the letters were taken up by expressions of delight at the return of Noel, and surprise at that of Margaret, and an eager affectionate welcome to the whole party to join them in their rocky home as soon as possible.

It remained now to decide the route by which Naples was to be reached. The choice lay between posting overland through Siena and Rome, and going by steamer from Leghorn. Margaret's suggestion, that they must not linger by the way now that they were expected, decided the question in favour of the sea route. Noel readily acquiesced, for he felt that it would be better not to visit Rome with her at all, than have to hurry through it as if it were a mere railway-station. There was, moreover, a feeling in the minds of both, that Rome was in some sense the property of James, so far as Margaret was concerned, and that all her associations there belonged to him. But neither of them expressed this feeling to the other.

So the evening of the next day but one found them gliding through the clear seas amid the lovely isles that skirt the Bay of Naples, while the fair city and its beautiful, capricious tyrant occupied the landscape beyond. Margaret and Edmund stood together upon the deck, gazing upon the wondrous scene. Both were profoundly sorrowful at the thought of the near ending of their happiness, and this sadness was intensified by the magic beauty around. All the warm bright colouring seemed to be withdrawn from their own lives to make the beauty without.

As they approached the landing-place, Noel looked anxiously towards the people standing there, for he dreaded lest it should have occurred to Sophia to come over and meet them, and so rob him of a few more hours of his exclusive possession of Margaret. He had, however, been sufficiently vague in the letter by which he announced their early arrival at Capri, to prevent the calamity he feared; and he was thus enabled to deposit his treasure safely in his own old favourite rooms in the Hotel di Roma, where they could pass the evening away from the noise of the rattling streets, and gaze from the verandah, alternately upon the long streamers of lurid light which gleamed

unbroken from the burning mountain across the smooth bay to their very feet, and upon each other

What is to come after? what is to come after?' murmured Margaret, breaking from her reverie with a deep sigh. 'Oh, for chains to bind fast the present.'

'I claim a boon for having brought you safe so far,' said Edmund, with vivacity. She looked wonderingly at him, and waited for his proposition.

'They cannot expect us on yonder rock for another day or two. We have already had so much sea between this and Mexico, that we may well be excused from having yet more of it than we can help. So I propose to take you by land to a point still nearer to Capri, and cross thence in a boat.'

'And when do you propose to arrive?'

'The second day after to-morrow. We shall have to make some excursions to Naples with Sophia, but I want to show you my most favourite spots by myself. So, if you will let me, I will engage a carriage to-morrow, and, after we have glanced round Naples, drive to Vesuvius and Pompeii, and so on to the point where we will take again to the water.'

'Well, I will leave it all in your hands, trusting to you not to make the interval before we join our friends so long as to give them cause for surprise. We must remember that we are no longer invisible beings living in a world of our own.'

'Thanks, darling. I think, then, that if you will leave it all to me, you will have no cause to regret it. A line to my uncle to say that we shall sleep at Amalfi on Thursday night, and cross to Capri the following morning, will make all easy.'

CHAPTER XLI.

A DRIVE to Posilippo, Baiæ, and Avernus in the morning. In the afternoon, a visit to the galleries of the Capodimonte, to see the face that Noel reckoned the most lovely of all faces painted on canvas, that of Iphigenia. Margaret owned it to be lovely indeed, but Noel was disappointed on this his second view, and rejoiced in his disappointment, inasmuch as he could hold it a tribute to the ideal that the interval had revealed to him.

And in the early evening the whole party moved to Resina for the night, in light travelling order, leaving the bulk of their baggage to be sent direct to Capri.

A little later Noel and Margaret started to ride up the mountain to see the eruption that was then taking place. Not a violent eruption, with fierce rendings of the mountain, and cannon-like discharges of fire and rocks; but one that derived its grandeur and impressiveness from the steady, ceaseless oozing from the volcano's vast pores of a broad, deep stream of red liquid lava, which proceeded ever slowly and silently on its downward path, as if with a consciousness of its resistless might.

The surface of this flowing stream had sufficiently cooled and hardened in places to be passable by those who were well enough shod; and having taken care, before starting, to see that Margaret fulfilled this condition, Noel proffered to conduct her to a sort of rocky island which projected from the midst of the molten current, whence the view promised to be most magnificent. The guides, on being appealed to, said it could be done, provided the signor and signora would each take one of their hands during the passage between the glowing cracks of the lava. Noel would not confess such inferiority of his own perceptions and nerves to those of the guides by accepting such a condition; and he felt that he was mistaken in Margaret if she hesitated to entrust herself entirely to him in any such physical danger, after the experience she had had of his steadfastness in the critical position of their moral relations. He knew of no other woman to whom he would have proposed such a trial of courage as that which he was now proposing to Margaret.

Motioning the guides aside he offered her his hand, gazing keenly the while into her face. Without an instant's hesitation, but calmly as if unconscious of any risk, she placed one hand in his, and with the other so disposed of her dress as to allow her to step freely out. They then stepped boldly upon the semi-molten pavement, and proceeded rapidly towards the desired point, yet with such perfect presence of mind and skill in avoiding the dangerous chasms as to elicit cries of astonishment from the guides, who stood for a moment aghast at the courage of the signora Inglese, and then hastened to place themselves one in advance and the other in the rear of the bold adventurers. The path lay through fire and sulphurous smoke, but not a false

or hesitating step betrayed doubt or fear, and when at length the whole party stood together on the island, the guides could not fast enough pour out their expressions of admiration, 'and for a donna so pale and fair, too!'—they thought courage always went with dark complexions.

There was no need to return by the same track, as the wind had shifted and cleared one that was higher up and above the lava stream from the smoke which had otherwise hidden it. So Resina was regained without further risk, and Margaret and Noel passed the interval before the time for sleep in conversing on the various beauties of which he had given her a glimpse, and in lamenting the brief period left to them.

'We must make up for shortness of time by intensity of sensation,' said Noel, 'and discuss events hereafter as opportunity may offer. To-morrow we leave the domain of art for that of nature. After a peep at Pompeii and its treasures, we trust for all beauty to earth and sea and sky.

'What better can we have?' asked Margaret. 'Surely they comprise all that we can hope for or wish.'

'Or, at least, they suggest it all. It ever seems to me as a sort of blasphemy against one's mother to undervalue and abuse this world as so many people deemed good are given to doing. But they have not the same revelations of its possibilities that have been vouchsafed to us. For them God is banished, or postponed to another state of existence.'

And so that day came to an end, and Margaret sought to know nothing concerning Noel's plans for the morrow, for she trusted all to him, even as she had done in the midst of the fire and the smoke and the flowing lava of the mountain, whose terrors they had, in mutual reliance, together dared.

Noel and Margaret met next morning in the breakfast-room of their hotel, while the dame was yet preparing the children. It was a glorious morning without, yet the entrance of Margaret seemed to Noel to shed a splendour over the room which the sun had failed to impart.

'My morning glory!' he exclaimed, advancing to greet her, and, in his enthusiasm, adding to his usual salutation a kiss upon the fair forehead that inclined timidly towards him.

She was in a light summer morning-dress, elegant by its perfect and girlish simplicity, devoid of all prevailing fashionable uglinesses, and showing off her lithe figure to admiration.

'Our last day,' she said, 'and so I must make an allowance for you. Do you know that I almost think it is fortunate that the end is so near? I feel that this daily growing climax of loveliness and grandeur and enjoyment could not continue to increase much longer. The strain would become too great, and a reaction and collapse set in, which would be doubly painful from the comparison. I should not like you to get tired of having me for a travelling companion.'

'And so we are to snap our career of bliss short off,—to quench the sun of happiness in its zenith,—in order to deprive it of the possibility of sinking or waning; on the principle of the crazy miser, who deliberately starved himself to death, for fear of being left, in his old age, without the means to buy food!'

'I do not hold,' said Margaret, 'with Francesca,

> "Nessun maggiore dolore,
> Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
> Nella miseria,"

unless the decline has been accompanied by a loss of faith, and a sense of wrong-doing. Let this life of joy be cut short at its intensest point, and methinks I could pass a glad eternity in dreaming over it. I have, however, duties and occupations which I dearly love, in tending my little darlings, to console me. But what will you turn to? After such a holiday, you will turn to some real work, something useful and worthy of you, will you not?'

'Ah, Margaret, if I have to leave you, as seems to be inevitable, I can only foresee myself as occupied by one idea. I shall return to Florence, and give no rest to clay or marble until I have fixed for ever the form that I love so dearly. I shall thus be giving to the world the best that I know; and that is what I take to be the whole duty of man. But there is one obstacle; one difficulty that I may never overcome. My memory will never lose that which it knows of you. I need no model for features or expression; but how am I to render the rest? Whether it be under the guise of an Eve, a Venus, or a Psyche, the figure must be divested of anything conventional or accidental, and correspond in its pure perfection with the aspect of the face. The attitude, too, must be carefully considered and studied. I have resolved that my statue be a standing one, but I have not been able to determine the pose. I want her to indicate so many things; or, at least, a capacity

for so many: love, tenderness, innocence, nobleness, strength, self-devotion; in short, all qualities that go to make up the perfection which you have taught me to look for in woman. You see, I hold to the old theory, that all parts of the physical form are in such harmony with the individual character, that it is impossible to make one person stand as a model for another. However perfect in its own proportions each model may be, a figure compounded of parts from each would be only an inharmonious monstrosity, devoid of all individuality. So I sometimes think that I shall have to follow the example of the German student, and cultivate systematic dreaming, until I obtain a vision that shall fulfil all my requirements. Will you aid me so far, and promise to appear to me in my dreams when I want a model? I could not bear to go hunting among professional sitters for the semblance of graces which belong to you only.'

This last suggestion made Margaret shudder.

'No, no,' she said, 'anything must be better than that. How curious it is that the world to which we belong should be so constituted as to put any difficulty in the way of a thing that seems so natural and simple. Surely the great sculptors and painters of old had no such hindrance to contend with? Any woman must have thought it an honour to be chosen as a model for the beauty of her form, and to be transmitted to posterity as the highest type of the race.'

'Yes, indeed,' responded Edmund. 'Could we but restore to the world the idea of a beautiful humanity, of which Greece seems to have had the exclusive perception, we should do much towards achieving a new renaissance, and displace the theology that sees only a demon in man, by the more Christian notion of a divine humanity. The first and last of blasphemies I take to be that which insists on a separation between the divine and the human.'

'How like James! Do you know, that although you are so different from him, yet I am often startled by a resemblance. He, too, prefers the Greek to the Hebrew idea as an element of civilisation.'

'I can only account for the likeness,' returned Noel, 'by supposing that he adopted the idea on principle, while I was born to it. We were both at Oxford, so that the University may be partly responsible for it. I know no more powerful agent in producing the higher morality than the love of beauty. If all people believed that only in proportion as they cultivated

the internal beauty, which is of the sentiments, they would attain to external beauty, heaven would cease to offer any special attractions to the pious!'

Noel's plan for the day included so long a drive, that not only an early start from Resina was indispensable, but the visit to Pompeii must be of the shortest. It ended by the latter being abandoned, for, as Margaret suggested, the idea of a visit to the city of the dead accorded but ill with the bright teeming scenes of life and beauty through which they were passing, and it would be well to leave something for an excursion from Capri. So the vetturino was ordered to drive on by Castellamare and La Cava, to that which Noel considered the climax and acmé of all possible terrestrial beauty, the Riviera d'Amalfi.

It wanted an hour or more of sunset when the turn was taken that leads from the main road along the famous promontory, on the opposite sides of which lie the two most exquisitely situated of all towns, Sorrento and Amalfi. Here and there the air was heavy with the scent of orange-groves, and, during the whole twelve or fourteen miles were headland reaching beyond headland, and mountain rising over mountain, on the one hand; and on the other, innumerable bays with all exquisite curves; and now near, now far below, as the road rose and sank, lay the deep blue of the still Salernian Gulf; and over and above all, the sky glowing, as sunset approached, with thin clouds of crimson and gold, and long gleams of amber light athwart the ridges; and Art came in, with its never superfluous aid, to crown each jutting rock with many a tower, quaint, bold, and Saracenic, to whose picturesqueness Time has added the finishing touch of ruin.

Margaret lay back in the carriage faint with the emotion of so much beauty, and for some time, while all gazed, none spoke. Another turn in the winding road would disclose Amalfi, and just as its picturesque buildings were revealed, the moon rose over the gulf, and over Pæstum, and over the Calabrian wilds far away, and transmuted the glowing hills into silvery moonlight.

As if to complete and crown the day with an appropriate termination, quarters were engaged for the night in the romantically placed 'Hotel della Luna,' once a convent, and still retaining its characteristic cloisters and court of cypresses.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE little ones were early taken by the dame to bed, and Margaret, who remained throughout the evening in a sort of coma, would have followed their example, had not Noel induced her to take some turns with him in the congenial gloom of the cool cloisters. By the way in which she leant upon his arm he perceived that she was not quite herself, and felt inclined to reproach himself for the fatigue to which he had subjected her.

After walking for a short time, he had a sofa placed in the corridor overlooking the bay, and there, from their lofty casement, they sat together long after the whole household had retired for the night, rarely speaking, but indulging in the deep mutual reverie which is the most eloquent language of lovers such as they.

To both it seemed as if the supreme trial of their lives, the hour of bereavement and of widowhood, was at hand with the morrow's sun. Occasionally Margaret's mind seemed to wander from the present into a region whither Noel failed to follow her, for she murmured strange and broken words. Once he caught a sentence which he recognised as an echo of Theckla, in 'Wallenstein,' and which suggested a struggle going on in her mind: 'Has he not a right to his own creature?' And once, 'Surely such love has its rights, as well as its duties.' And then she seemed to doze, after which she was refreshed, and ready to talk with him.

'I suppose one could live up to it, so as to lose the agony of the pleasure? I am so glad you did not tell me beforehand.'

'I know too well,' he replied, 'that anticipation is the grave of delight. To-day's experience can never be repeated. Mental emotions, once felt, pass for ever. To-morrow evening, or the next, we might sit here in the same way, but there could be no return of the ecstasy. Whether happily or not, memory is too strong for such feelings to recur in their first vividness and freshness.'

Then they proceeded to talk of the meeting of the morrow, and of Edmund's intentions after he had seen his uncle, and deposited Margaret with her relations.

'I dare not stay long with you and Sophia together,' he said. 'As soon as my uncle releases me, I shall take a studio

either in Naples, Rome, or Florence, and make a marble Margaret for myself.'

'You never spoke ironically to me before,' she observed.

'Nothing was farther from my thought,' he returned, a little surprised at her ready appropriation of the phrase.

'No, no, I was foolish; and I think it must be that the strain of this too delicious time has been too much for me, and, added to the prospect of its termination, has made me sensitive and irritable. I am not accustomed to happiness, you know. No, I am convinced that, to the very depth of your heart, you have all regard for me, all belief in me. But are you so sure that you will always recognise whatever I have done as the highest?'

'Oh, Margaret, my sole angel, you know that you hold all the trust and faith of my whole nature, and that I shall never read you except as you would wish to be read. To cease to believe in you would be, for me, the advent of madness; the final catastrophe in my soul of God and the universe.'

She silently pressed his hand for a few moments, and then rose to retire. Edmund rose at the same moment, and she suffered him to clasp her fervently, as a last adieu before their separation.

Noel remained in the corridor some time longer. In addition to the sadness engendered by the near termination of this the sweetest period of his existence, he was somewhat alarmed at the effect which the long-continued tension of feeling had produced upon Margaret; and he comprehended the danger which even the purest affection and the strongest resolution might run in the presence of so long and intense a strain;—danger to the physical powers also, of which she seemed to him to exhibit the effect.

CHAPTER XLIII.

'MAMMA! uncle! such a pretty little steamer!' cried the elder of Margaret's little girls, running into the room where she sat with Noel next morning, at a somewhat late breakfast.

Looking out, Noel saw a small excursion steamer approach-

ing the town, having a number of passengers on deck, evidently for the most part English tourists; and he thought to himself how much pleasanter would be the quiet row with Margaret, than the bustle of a number of talkative sight-seers.

A few minutes afterwards a note, written in pencil, was brought to him. It was from Sophia Bevan:—

'We are all on board, and have brought all the foreign population of Capri,—Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban,—the first, your uncle, I the second, and the others the last, all to bring you over in triumph. I know we are in time, for we have not passed you on the way, and they tell me the pretty boat on the beach is ordered for you. But I follow this myself, as you may not be quite ready.'

Noel had just been describing for Margaret their row to Capri, and they were looking forward to the delight of reclining at ease in their boat, gazing up at the blue sky, and down into the magical ultramarine of the water; gliding by the isles of the Sirens, and listening the while to the choruses of the boatmen, for one of which he had years before written some words, which, rude and simple, went well, he thought, with the swing of the air and the sweep of the oars, and which he would teach her to sing.

They had not recovered from a certain amount of dismay occasioned by the threatened inroad upon their plans, when Sophia burst in with even more than her old hearty, affectionate boisterousness, and for the next few minutes all was demonstration and Babel.

'But where are the little darlings?' she cried presently, on remembering that Margaret had children. 'I dote on babies, and am sure I can eat yours.'

Margaret smiled, and went to the door, but the dame, who had been watching for this opportunity, entered at the moment, and led the little things up to Sophia. She went into genuine ecstasies over their delicate spiritual beauty, declaring that she must change places with the dame, and take charge of them herself And then she sat down and took them both in her lap, and sang them a charming child's ballad, while they opened their eyes very wide indeed at the spectacle of an energy and an animation that was so new to them.

'And now what will aunty and uncle say to my keeping them waiting all this time? What do you say? Will you come with us in the steamer, and have a peep at Pæstum before go-

ing to Capri, or shall the steamer call for us all here on its way back; or do you prefer going in the boat, as you intended?'

'I take my orders here,' said Noel, turning to Margaret. 'I must go down and see my uncle, but I think you are hardly sufficiently recovered from the fatigue you felt so much yesterday, to encounter the society of the steamer. It is hard to part from you so soon again,' he said to Sophia, 'but unless you stay and go with us in the boat, I really think we had better keep to our original plan, and meet you at Capri on your return; when I shall give up my charge to the exclusive care of Lady Bevan and yourself, and ask for a receipt to forward to James.'

'I wish we had known sooner of your coming,' said Sophia, 'and then we would not have invited the party in the steamer. I tell you what I will do. I will bid them content themselves for to-day with ranging over Amalfi; and bring mamma and Mr Tresham up here to you, and all go home together in the evening. Will that suit you, Margaret?'

'I do not like to disappoint your guests,' she replied, 'but I am not equal to much to-day. I must leave it to you to settle for me.'

So Noel accompanied Sophia down to the steamer, where he was grieved to find his uncle altogether aged and weakened, and much changed from the hale man he had known him.

Mr Tresham was much affected at seeing once more the nephew whom he regarded as a son, but said so cheerily that he should soon pick up again, now that Edmund had returned to look after him, that Noel felt a degree of remorse at having so long absented himself from his only relative, and at having suffered the absorbing interest of his love to make him oblivious of the duties which, he now perceived, he owed elsewhere.

A short consultation then took place, which ended in Noel getting his own way, and preventing Sophia from rejoining Margaret,—whom he knew to be little equal to the stimulus of her society just then,—by insisting on her going with them to Pæstum, while Lady Bevan went ashore to keep her niece quiet company until the steamer should return.

The excursion, which may readily be imagined to have formed for Edmund no slight contrast to that which he would have arranged for himself, had circumstances allowed it, nevertheless afforded much material for admiration and enjoyment.

Sophia seemed to him grander than ever in her exhaustless energy and wit; but he was unable to determine whether she

had really grown in these respects, or whether she only seemed so by virtue of the contrast she made with the calm divinity of his adoration.

'Well, dear boy,' was her greeting, on getting him into a corner by themselves, after presenting him to the party, 'it is so nice to have you back again, and I have such heaps to tell you, and to get you to do for me. All my projects for reforming the world are at a standstill for want of a masculine coadjutor. I used to think I could get on by myself, or, at least, that I could find unmarried women who could unite with me in my projects for bettering the condition of our sex. But of no ten virgins, now-a-days, are anything like so many as five wise. And I very much doubt if there ever were. And now tell me all about James Maynard, and how he came to let his wife elope with you. Do you know, it is very funny.'

'It seemed the only thing to be done,' replied Edmund, in a quiet matter-of-fact tone that precluded controversy. 'Your letter about my uncle left me no option about coming home at once, and James had long made up his mind to send his family to England, unless things promised to become quieter in Mexico. The effect of the Intervention promises to be by no means a quieting one at present, but he rather hastened his plans for the sake of availing himself of my escort. I am most anxious for his letters by next mail, to know both how public affairs are going on, and how he bears his loneliness.'

'And is Margaret very anxious?'

'Oh, yes. I suspect it is as much the expectation of having a letter from him in a day or two, as her journey, that has knocked her up. Calm and quiet as she appears to be, she has very deep sympathies where her affections are engaged. For herself, she is as strong to bear as you are to act.'

'And you think my fears as to their unhappiness are unfounded?'

'Really,' he replied, laughing, 'you tax my powers of discernment too far. You know them both well enough to be aware that neither of them are common characters; and therefore, you can understand that their what is called "happiness" would scarcely be indicated by the ordinary demonstrations. But I think that in such matters it is best for those who have a right to be interested to form their own judgment.'

'Do you know,' said Sophia, shifting the subject, 'that it is so pleasant to see you come home looking nice, and presentable,

and even Londony, when I half fancied you would be rough and unrefined, and bearded like a gold-digger, after your life in California and Mexico. It really looks as if there must be some civilising influences out there which are not generally suspected at home.'

Noel saw that Sophia, divining a cause in his association with Margaret, was only trying to get at his secret by another road; but he was too well on his guard to be *drawn* in that way; and went on to ask about his uncle. She, however, could only say that she did not know what mental cause there might be for his illness. That these city men were so close on the subject of their credit, that even if he had been worried by his affairs going wrong, he never would have mentioned it. And then the conversation was brought to an end by their approaching the shore, where the famous old temples, standing grandly amid the wild desolation of the ancient Calabrian coast, engaged all the attention of their visitors.

The hint that his uncle might have been unfortunate as well as ill, evoked from Noel even more than usual tenderness in his manner to the old man. Giving him his arm, he supported him along the rough walk from the beach to the ruins; and Mr Tresham, grateful for the attention and affection, intimated that he had been longing for Edmund's return, as there was much that he wanted to talk to him about.

'Well, uncle, if it is business, we will postpone it till to-morrow. Thank heaven, there is no chance of either of us starving, and that is about all I care for. I have no ambition to be rich, so long as I have my health and brains. I have a new mistress now, who can dispense with wealth.'

'Indeed, indeed, my boy? And who and what may she be?' asked Mr Tresham, somewhat gravely.

'Only Art, uncle. I mean to work, whether rich or poor, and to make my own name and fame. There is so much to be studied, and learnt, and done in the world, that I need no stewardship of fortune to occupy my time. Ah, uncle, great and important as is the world in which you have played so conspicuous and useful a part, there is another world that seems to claim me for its own, even the world of knowledge, and truth, and goodness, and beauty, all of which are comprised in the word Art. Why, on this very stone, on which you shall sit and rest a bit, are carved characters and emblems which, to the instructed eye, reveal the rudimentary unity of all the re-

ligions of mankind, and enable us to trace back for thousands of years the mental history of our race.'

So Edmund ran on, tending and cheering the broken old man, while talking of things little comprehensible by him. And his end was gained, for he heard his uncle murmur, as he rose from the stone,—

'Well, well, it is fortunate, and I need not be so much troubled as I have been; for you, at least, will not be bitterly disappointed.'

Arrived at the noble temple of Neptune, Noel felt even more intensely than he had anticipated, his desire to be there alone with Margaret. Solitude and repose are the essence of ruins, and the gay company jarred on the mood evoked in him by the scene.

He gathered from the highest point to which he could climb a spray of green and a wildflower to take to Margaret, and was glad when the time came for re-embarking.

The return was enlivened by gay songs and sparkling witticisms, in both of which departments Sophia shone pre-eminent. The party at Amalfi was called for, and Capri was duly reached; Noel enjoying a few happy moments with Margaret on the passage through the blue waters and their enchanting scenery. While Sophia, hearing the children greeting him as 'uncle,' admired the ingenuity of the device, for she perceived at a glance all the pleasant exigencies created by the situation.

END OF PART II.

PART THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

Mr Tresham was possessed by an ambition. That ambition, however, had ceased to be centered in himself as he receded from the prime of life, and as his nephew approached it. It then became his desire to found and endow a great and wealthy family. His sister's only child, Edmund Noel, was well-born enough for anything. He, the uncle, would supply the idea and the fortune, and by the co-operation of his nephew in an ingenious combination of names, the Noel-Treshams would rise into dignity as one of the great families of England.

Without divulging his scheme, Mr Tresham bent every energy toward the acquirement of such wealth as would justify him in anticipating a splendid career for the name of Noel-Tresham. He was much attached to his nephew, but felt that in this somewhat precarious world he would have been better pleased to have had a second string to his bow in the shape of another heir in reserve. An idea occurred to him while enacting the part of father at the marriage-ceremony of the Maynards. It was that James, Lord Littmass, should be his second string. Still keeping his idea to himself he set to work with renewed energy to increase his already large fortune.

Shrewd and self-reliant, Mr Tresham neither employed, nor consulted, nor trusted any man as partner, confidential clerk, or agent. His own knowledge of the principles and details of all branches of commerce and all kinds of produce, had sufficed to enable him to become a name and a power in the city.

It was through fancying that he was on equally safe ground in relying on his estimate of men, that Mr Tresham made his first and his last mistake. Accustomed all his life to the regime of probity, which had made the name of British merchant a pride and a boast, Mr Tresham was slow in admitting the idea that the old standard of honour, which still prevailed out of business circles, had come to obtain but a diminished recognition in the city.

It must be said in defence of his discrimination that the approaches of the conspirators against his honour and his substance were laid down with consummate skill. It was not merely that the bribe was an enormous one, but the manner of its conveyance to him was so flattering and delicate, that only the most ingrained suspiciousness of character and almost preternatural discernment could have prompted hesitation.

The Spanish Government had accepted the tender of an English contractor to construct a certain railway. It was clear that, with capital, the line could be made at a vast reduction upon the contract price. The contractor, not having the requisite capital at his command, sought the assistance of a London Company of good standing. The enterprise bade fair to be so profitable that the company, rather than forego all share in it owing to its own funds not being immediately available, fixed upon Mr Tresham as one able and likely to help it. The whole scheme was placed before him, and he was assured that his signature as collateral security, together with those of the directors of the company, would be ample satisfaction for the required advances from the banks, and that in consideration of the accommodation, a portion of the anticipated profits of the undertaking, amounting to some hundreds of thousands of pounds, should be his, and that the Spanish Government had, through its agents, expressed its high satisfaction at a gentleman of Mr Tresham's standing being associated in the business. The matter was urged upon him by a man of high city reputation, who was a director of the company, as well as of the bank that was to make the principal advances, and it was chiefly upon his representation that Mr Tresham's signature would be sufficient, and that he would not be called upon for any actual outlay, that he at length consented to give his name.

No sooner was his act past recall than he was allowed to discover that he had been deliberately and mercilessly victimised. So far from the company's position being sound, as

the balance sheets placed before him had indicated, it was already enormously indebted to the very bank whose director had induced him to sign; and instead of advances being made upon his security for the purpose of fulfilling the contract, the contract itself was little more than a myth, and his acceptances went in repayment of debts which had been concealed from him. Instead, moreover, of his co-signitaries, the conspirators, being valid securities with him, they all proved to be men of straw, and he was saddled with their portion of the liabilities in addition to his own. So large was the aggregate amount that it threatened to engulf his whole estate.

In the first agony of his humiliation and mortification his system, ordinarily equable, gave way. A stroke of paralysis made it for some time impossible for him to take any steps towards an extrication, and it was only guided by the light of his unconscious and broken utterings that his lawyer obtained a clue which enabled him to arrest the action of the creditors. As soon as Mr Tresham was again able to give any intelligent attention to his affairs, the action of the lawyer was confirmed and his case strengthened by the evidences of conspiracy and fraud, which Mr Tresham was able to supply.

'And now,' said the poor victim one day to his lawyer, after a lengthened consultation, 'what do you think of my chances? Must I begin the world afresh, or will they leave me enough for my old age, and something over for my nephew?'

'In strict justice,' said the lawyer, 'you ought not to lose a sixpence. But strict justice is a thing which no law that has yet been devised can ensure. Do not let the word escape you that I am going to utter. My best hope is in forcing our opponents to a compromise. But they must not think so. Rather must we appear as indignantly threatening a counter-prosecution for fraud and conspiracy. We may not be able to prove these points against the principal enemy, the bank, but we may indicate enough of our case to induce them to think it prudent to seek for a compromise, which would at once lessen our liabilities by at least one half. The principal steps I have taken during your illness have proved successful beyond my most sanguine expectations. I have called upon them to prove value received for your acceptances, and obtained an order of the court for them to produce their minute-books. It is very clear to me, from what you say, that they cannot do the first, and I know enough of the present mode of conducting business in some

of these banks, to be pretty certain that they dare not do the second. But the proceedings will take a long time; and the best thing you can do, after making some necessary affidavits in Court, will be to accept the offer of your friends' companionship and go abroad for a thorough change. You will come back, I trust, a new man in health, and still a subject of envy to a good many of us in purse.'

Mr Tresham employed the morning after Edmund Noel's arrival at Capri in telling him all this. He also intimated to him that however cheered he felt by his nephew's society, he could serve him still better by going to London to watch the proceedings and keep the lawyers up to the mark.

'All these affairs,' he said, 'require undivided individual attention, and by making the case your own, you will materially help in discomfiting the enemy. But now I want to know about Maynard and the prospects in Mexico. I am glad to see his sweet wife back with her children, and think that under the circumstances of the country it was only prudent to send them. But what of Maynard himself? Is he a man fit to be left alone? I may as well tell you that I am myself no longer interested in the property, and yet that I am more interested in it than I should have been were it involved in my disaster. As if by a lucky inspiration, shortly before I signed those miserable bills, I executed a deed of gift conveying the whole right and title of the property in Mexico to you and to Maynard in equal shares; so that it at least is safe from the harpies in London. You and he are, therefore, partners in respect of the mine, and must determine the best course to pursue in regard to it. If it makes you rich, and I have to become poor through my folly, I may not object to receiving back from you an allowance out of my gift:' (he smiled sadly as he said this:) 'indeed, nothing can be more fortunate than the circumstance of my having safely transferred it before my embarrassments began. Otherwise it would have been liable with the rest, and figured as an "asset" in the schedule of my estate.'

'My dear uncle,' exclaimed Edmund, 'your generosity to myself is beyond my thanks. And I cannot tell you how grateful I feel for your conduct to the Maynards. They deserve all that we can do for them. Nothing could be more fortunate than your having done this just when you did. It will always be easy for me to re-transfer my half to you when matters are settled and there is no longer any danger. But I

quite understand your feeling about James. He is a man of peculiar temperament, and it is impossible to foresee the effect that any given circumstances may have upon him. There is enough, however, in the condition of Mexico to keep him from brooding too much over his domestic affairs; and it is probable that, as he may have to lead a more active life and be more away from his work than hitherto, the absence of his family may save him from considerable embarrassment.'

And then Edmund excited his uncle's interest and astonishment by telling him of the remarkable position which James and himself had occupied in Mexico, and of their relations with Juarez, and their endeavours to influence the conduct of the expedition in favour of the President and the aboriginal inhabitants.

'The only source of danger to our interests that I see in this,' said Mr Tresham, when Edmund had finished his narration, 'lies in the possibility of its exciting the anger of the Spanish parties, should they succeed in crushing your friend Juarez.'

'My hope,' said Edmund, 'is that, if war breaks out, the fighting may not extend so far from the capital as to affect either the working of the mine, or the transport to the coast. The relations between James and the President are known to no one but themselves, and of the protection of the latter we are certain so long as he can give it. The principal risk in case of a war is from forced loans to the dominant party, and from the strolling bands of robbers.'

'What do you think of the Emperor's scheme?'

'It is so wild and fanciful, and involves such a manifest usurpation over the Mexican people, that, unless I had heard it from Juarez himself, and had it confirmed afterwards by our Minister, I should have deemed it altogether incredible. I cannot believe that England will back France in carrying it out, or that France will persist in endeavouring to carry it out by herself.'

'You think it cannot succeed?'

'Not so long as Juarez lives and has a Mexican to back him, even if there were no Great Republic alongside. The French Emperor presumes upon the American civil war; but, however that may end, the Americans will suffer no empire to stand long in Mexico.'

Noel remained several days in Capri before he could make

up his mind as to his future course. His uncle so evidently enjoyed his society and so rapidly improved in health under its cheering influence, that he was very reluctant to leave him. He had also succeeded, partly by his own tact, and partly by the consummate perception of Margaret, in baffling and almost setting to rest the dreaded scrutiny of Sophia, so that there was not the drawback that he had anticipated to his enjoyment of Margaret's society. For Margaret herself he had, if possible, a higher admiration than before. For she had no sooner found herself fixed in a settled home for a season, than she set herself in the most methodical manner to the regular division of her time and employment of her faculties. In the instruction of her children and the pursuit of her old studies, music and painting, especially landscape painting, for which Capri afforded opportunities of most glorious scenery and colouring, Margaret astonished Sophia by her disciplined self-helpful method and resolution. And both Noel and Sophia owned that she excelled them in the power of withdrawing herself from merely desultory engrossments, and in practical devotion to refining and ennobling work: while Lady Bevan delighted to recognise in her an identity of character with her own family which strongly reminded her of her own lost sister.

The presence of Margaret was always a sign for mere *persiflage* to vanish, and for conversation insensibly to take a higher tone. Those personal discussions which, involving the dissection and analysis of individuals, form so large a part of ordinary conversations, were only intensely distressing to her; and Noel observed that whenever, under the influence of strangers, the conversation took the shape of gossip, it was no rare thing for Margaret to disappear until after the departure of the visitants. Little accustomed as she was to general society, she could not comprehend that the most ill-natured stories may be related, the most unkind analyses exhibited, without a particle of bad feeling in the minds of narrator or listeners towards the subject of the conversation, but solely for the sake of telling a good story or saying a sharp thing.

'A good story is always true,' Sophia sought to persuade her, 'and one must have somebody for a peg to hang it on. So far from thinking worse of one's peg, one is rather grateful to any one who will fulfil the part.'

However, without in the least appearing to have a design in it and without feeling the smallest indifference to the society

of her relations, Margaret contrived gradually to get the first half of each day more and more to herself, and to accustom them to expect her society only when her morning's task was finished. Yet, though she shrank from general association with strangers, the society of Sophia, when they were together in their own circle, was perpetually a wonderment and a new delight.

'Oh Sophia, what a charming Lady Superior you would make to some convent,' cried Margaret, one evening when roused by an unusual exhibition of her talent and accomplishments.

'Thank you, my dear,' was her answer; 'there is only one kind of convent I can ever consent to join, and that has not been founded yet. I have invented the plan of it, and have been waiting for Edmund to come home and help me to carry it out. You may look incredulous, but I am in earnest. I mean to start a convent where babies are allowed.'

The shouts of laughter, which, led by Noel, here broke forth, interrupted her for some moments; but affecting not to comprehend the mirth, she presently went on:—

'There is nothing ridiculous at all about it. Just think what a comfort it would be to numbers of poor women—now don't begin laughing again till you know what I am going to say—who in the multiplicity of their duties, and their children, don't know which way to turn, to be able to deposit their little ones in some nice place where they will be well cared for and brought up, not by mere paid women, who will do it in a hard business kind of way, but by tenderly nurtured gentlewomen who know what a happy home is, and who will devote themselves to the occupation out of benevolence and a desire to be useful. And think, too, what a blessing to the thousands of girls who pine at home in idleness, and wither away, soul and body, for lack of something to draw out their natural sympathies, and convert their desultory, aimless, hopeless lives to real use and beauty. Why, the habit of such an occupation would be the best education a young lady could have, and would go far to fit her to be a mother to her own children some day; and I assure you I know very few women who are fit to be mothers so far as the education of their children's minds is concerned.'

'I fancied,' said Noel, 'from what you wrote to me in Mexico, that you were rather bitten by the Bostonian idea, and

were coveting the part of an English Margaret Fuller. I infinitely prefer your present scheme.'

'It has been growing by degrees,' replied Sophia; 'not that I have given up my plan of a woman's college or university; but, taking nature into my counsels, I have combined such elements of the male institution as are adapted to women, with those which are peculiar to women. Thus I have arrived at a result which entirely satisfies me; and the university of my sex is a university indeed, inasmuch as it comprises a nursery for babies, a school for children, a training for mothers that are to be, and classes for the higher instruction of women who remain single. Why, Margaret, what are those tears doing in your eyes?'

'I am only afraid that your students will be so happy in their college course that they will be very shy of leaving it for matrimony,' replied Margaret, seeking to conceal the moisture that, for very intensity of sympathy with Sophia's large benevolence, had gathered in her eyes.

'At any rate, it will do the men good to have to put a higher value upon us,' returned Sophia. 'But the beauty of my plan is that it affords a training and an occupation for women of every shade and character. What becomes of your stupid good-natured youths at school or college? Nothing. You work up the clever ones to an immense pitch, and ignore the others. Now in my institution the girls who will have the least turn for head-work, will generally be just those in whom the domestic faculties are strongest, and who will be invaluable in my children's department. Not that I mean to let any of them shirk any of the classes and occupy themselves exclusively with any one branch of study. The education is to be a thoroughly liberal one for all, and comprise all the arts from *belles-lettres* up to babies.'

'And when and where is the experiment to be made?'

'Ultimately in every town of any size. But first, I think, as near to Belgravia as I can obtain my supply of babies, for they will be as essential to my scheme, as a supply of "subjects" from the hospital or workhouse is for medical students. Think how blest I shall be by the unhappy damsels who are now condemned to pine in useless splendour and idle luxury, when I bring such an occupation for their faculties to their very doors. Indeed, this, too, is an essential part of my plan. I have no notion of universities of residence for my students. The home

life must be combined with the college life, if anything real and permanent is to come of it. It is a great mistake for you men to think that we women care for nothing except to dress and be admired. There is nothing we love so much as making ourselves useful. It is only from fancying that men like it, that some of us commit the foolish extravagancies in dress and manner for which men are the first to ridicule us.'

CHAPTER II.

THE first mail from Mexico, after their arrival in Capri, brought no letter from Maynard. His silence occasioned considerable uneasiness to Margaret and Noel, but on consulting together they determined to appear to take it as a matter of course, and suppose either that communication with the interior was uncertain, or that James had not reached home in time to write. But it was not the state of the country that occasioned their anxiety, nearly so much as the possible condition of James's own mind. They distrusted his power to retain his balance when left to himself, and it would have surprised them far less to see him make his appearance suddenly at any moment, than to learn that he had set himself to the steadfast performance of his duties.

It was in the pursuance of Margaret's firm resolve to give no hint of her actual relations with James, that she took this course in respect to the Bevans. Shrinking from Sophia's penetration and characteristic curiosity concerning the relations of her married friends, Margaret entrenched herself in a demeanour of calmness and confidence, which Sophia, in any one in whom she had less faith, would have ascribed to indifference. In nothing did their characters present a stronger contrast than in this. The more keenly Margaret felt, and the more deeply her spirit was affected, the more intense was the calmness of her demeanour externally. While with Sophia the excitement of the one was but the measure of the excitement of the other; and she owned her incapacity to believe in feelings that did not similarly exhibit themselves. It was on one occasion when she expressed her preference of sight to faith in

this respect, that Margaret reminded her that seeing was not always believing, and that the demonstration of feeling might be equally strong, although different in its character.

'Thus,' she said, 'the effect of terror on some persons is to make them scream out, and on others to paralyse the very power of utterance. So I think,' she added, with a gentle smile, 'that you must agree to let me express or not express my feeling in the way that suits me best, and I will not object to your claiming a like privilege for yourself.'

'Well,' replied Sophia, 'if I were a husband I am sure I should be more flattered by knowing that my wife was put out by not hearing from me, than by knowing that she took it quietly and showed no concern at all.'

'Ah, Sophia, you have yet to learn what trust is.'

'I would trust you anywhere, darling,' she exclaimed, repenting of the gratuitous sting of her last remark; 'but as for trusting a man! Why, are there no other women in Mexico?'

'Oh, that is what you are thinking of!' cried Margaret, in an ecstasy of merriment, which rather disconcerted Sophia. 'Poor dear James! how amused he would be at the suggestion.' And then she inwardly sighed to herself,

'Oh, that he could! What a relief it would be to—to us both.'

Noel was anxious to wait for a second month's mail to come in before he should, in fulfilment of his uncle's wish, return to London to enter into communication with the lawyers. He was quite satisfied with the power of Margaret's reserve to guard her and her secrets, and was both amused and pleased to observe how the very quietness of her disposition made her more than a match for any curiosity.

Before the next mail steamer arrived from Mexico, news came that the British and Spanish portions of the expedition had returned home, while the French remained to compel the country into acquiescence with their views. Edmund did not fully reveal to Margaret the uneasiness which this intelligence gave him; but his uncle was so much disturbed by the prospect of evil to Maynard and his enterprise, as to be seriously affected in health. The old man's nerve was evidently gone, and Edmund wished to remain a while longer with him; but the lawyers wrote urgently, and Mr Tresham himself was anxious for him to join them.

'Go, my boy,' he said, 'and save what you can out of the

fire for me,' and so hurried him off; while Margaret acquiesced outwardly but regretted secretly, and Sophia rebelled outwardly but acquiesced inwardly, inasmuch as her own sympathies were always strongest on the side of action.

Noel had been but a few days in London, when he received a letter from Margaret enclosing a copy of one she had just received from James.

'I did not mean to write,' ran his letter; 'but your friends will be wondering at your getting no letters, and that will be annoying to you. To set their minds at ease, tell them that the French are outraging Mexico, and that Mexico will resist them to the death. War seems inevitable. My own course is not yet determined, but it is probable that postal communication will be very uncertain.'

This was all he wrote to Margaret. Enclosed was a letter for Noel, written somewhat later, full of the solicitude for Margaret which James could not bring himself to exhibit to her, thanking Edmund for the care he was sure he had taken of her, and begging him to see that she had everything she could want to ensure comfort, and desiring that she might have a separate home of her own if it would add to her happiness. Of the state of affairs, he said that so many of the Spanish and clerical party were joining the French, out of hatred to Juarez, that it was doubtful if the President could long maintain himself in the capital. The main danger to mining interests, he believed, would consist in the forced loans to the dominant party, of which the ultimate repayment was doubtful, and the depredations of *guerrillas*.

'Most of the foreigners who are in a position similar to mine,' he wrote, 'are disposed to favour French ideas, in the hope of their leading to a more settled state of things. For my part, judging by what I know of the ability, patriotism, and resolution of Juarez and some of his supporters, I can at present foresee only a continued and bloody struggle, which will last until either the French get sick of Mexico, or the United States wind up their own affairs and come down with a settler upon all parties alike. There is not a particle of doubt that American sympathies are with Juarez, if only because he represents kindred institutions. In the mean time I see no reason to vary

from my original programme. I shall, therefore, adhere, as secretly as may be, to Juarez, and give him such aid with men or money as will serve him now, and ourselves in the future. Already, it is reported, the French have suffered so terribly in their siege of Puebla, that fresh aid from home is necessary to their keeping a footing in the country.'

The letter ended by saying that if the worst came to the worst, he would escape serious loss by closing the mine altogether, and placing it in charge of an agent; and when better times came it could be worked at double speed to make up for the loss of the interval.

Noel sent this letter to Margaret, telling her to read such parts of it to Mr Tresham as she could without alarming him; and when, soon after this, it came to be known that the French Emperor had actually thrown down a challenge to the United States by stating his design of restoring the prestige of the Latin race in the New World as a counterbalance to the Anglo-Saxon, Noel saw the sagacity and justice of Maynard's political views.

Of his mind in regard to Margaret, Noel and Margaret agreed that so long as he cherished resentment against her, as responsible for his domestic dissatisfaction, he was in little danger of any insane accession which might tempt him into rash action. They both felt, however, that such mood could not last very long, and they dreaded to think what his course might be if his longing to see her again should take possession of him with such intensity as to overwhelm all other considerations.

CHAPTER III.

DWELLING in London, and mainly occupied with lawyers and accountants, Noel led a life very different from that which he wished and intended. His whole heart was with Margaret on the blue Mediterranean, and his whole ambition to devote his life at once to her, and to the cultivation of an art inspired by her. Yet he could not but perceive the dangers of such a situation, or avoid owning to himself that the providence was not

altogether an unreasonable or an unkind one which at this moment seemed to dictate his career.

As the autumn vacations came on, and little could be done to further his work, he contemplated paying a visit to Capri, and proposing a removal to some other place for the winter. Sophia had for some time been wishing for a more exciting life. Mr Tresham had begun to pine for his own country, and thought he could now stand an English winter; and Lady Bevan, who never intimated a wish in opposition to the pleasure of those around her, allowed that of late she had thought more highly than ever of the charms of Linnwood.

'But what do you say, Margaret?' she asked of her niece, when the question was stirred.

'It is of no use to ask her,' exclaimed Sophia, 'she would remain here so long as there is a rock to be drawn, or a sky-tint to be caught, and never dream of going away, not even, I believe, to introduce her daughters into society whenever it may be time for them to come out. And, I doubt if she would think it necessary to make a change then. I don't understand such contentment—indeed, I am not sure that I approve of it; at least, I am sure I should not if I were married.'

It was on the tip of Margaret's tongue to say that they might all go and leave her there where she was so contented, and where her little ones throve so well, but she feared to give offence by seeming to wish to be left alone. Besides, she really had a great regard and admiration for Sophia, and was truly attached to her aunt; and as for Mr Tresham, her gentle firmness of character, and the depth of her sympathetic insight into his needs, had so won upon him that she shrank from giving him the pain she knew he would feel at being parted from her.

He answered Sophia for her before Margaret had made up her mind what to say.

'Whenever we do return to England, I shall insist on my house being at least one of her homes until Mr Maynard returns to claim her. She does not care for society as you do, and will be far happier spending the winter quietly with me and Edmund in London, than with the gay parties you will be having in Devonshire.'

It took all Margaret's power of self-control to keep from betraying the emotion she felt at this unexpected introduction of Edmund's name into the conversation; and the more so, as she had an instinctive feeling that Sophia Bevan regarded her

as an enigma, to which that young lady deemed it a duty to be ever seeking a key. Here her aunt interposed, thus sparing her the necessity for an immediate reply.

'Dear Margaret, this is very nice, and very kind of Mr Tresham, and I am grateful to him for an offer that will make such a pleasant variety in your life. I am sure James will be so pleased.'

And Margaret, having by this time perfectly recovered herself, replied to Mr Tresham by a grateful and affectionate look, of which he keenly appreciated the meaning.

'And you won't object to my helping in Sophia's feminine college when it is established? Your house will be so handy for me to attend the classes.'

'And, pray, do you contemplate teaching or learning?' asked Sophia, in amazement, for the scheme had not been referred to among them for a long time.

'I hope to be teacher in some classes, and pupil in others. But there is one branch that I want to see added to which I should specially devote myself. I quite approve of girls being taught to nurse children, but I think they ought also to learn how to nurse sick people. Now, there, I could really be of some use in teaching, I think.'

'And I am positive,' exclaimed Mr Tresham, 'that you will never have a pupil to rival or come near the teacher. With you and Miss Bevan for presiding geniuses, the institution will be governed, like the world's climate, by the sun and the wind.'

'Some time ago,' answered Sophia, 'I should have quarrelled with you for likening me to the wind, and depreciating my powers of persuasion. But now I am content to recognise and use force of whatever kind it may be. So you see, Margaret, I am not above owning that you have made a convert of me to your principles, if not to your practice.'

Their plans were still undecided, and Noel was daily expected to arrive in Capri, when a letter reached Mr Tresham without having first gone through his nephew's hands according to the arrangement made out of regard to Mr Tresham's infirmities. It was a letter from San Francisco announcing the utter break down of the bank, to save which Edmund had gone out four or five years before. The temptation to speculate in land, and especially in certain quicksilver mines, with which no good title could be given, had proved too strong for the local managers; and this time rescue was impossible. The loss to Mr Tresham

was very heavy, and the shock proved more than his already enfeebled system could bear. He, indeed, recovered consciousness, but his nephew only came in time to cheer his last hours by his affectionate attentions, and to assure him that his regrets would be all for his lost uncle and none for the lost inheritance.

Almost the last words of Mr Tresham concerned Margaret, for whom, in the precariousness of affairs in Mexico, he foresaw possible trouble in store.

Following her with beaming eyes, as she noiselessly arranged some matters necessary to his comfort in his room,

'Take care of her,' he whispered to Edmund, 'she is an angel.'

CHAPTER IV.

Noel was more deeply affected by the loss of his uncle than he had imagined possible, and regretted much that he had been prevented from passing more of the last few years with him. Sophia, who knew now the full extent of Mr Tresham's misfortunes, sought to console Noel by demonstrating the impossibility of his uncle ever having been happy again, had he lived; and endeavoured to brace him anew to the duty of extricating the estate, and becoming all that his uncle desired him to be.

Margaret, on the other hand, said not a word of consolation. It was rather her nature to ponder over a grief than to talk about it, and she judged Edmund by herself. Once only she revealed to him the thought that now worked in her; and deeply pained he was at finding that she was reproaching herself with having been the cause of his long sojourn in Mexico, and consequent separation from his uncle.

'Ah, Margaret,' said Edmund to her one day, after vainly trying to relieve her of this notion; 'providence must have a hard time of it with all the evil it allows, if its conscience is as tender as yours.'

'What is the use of affection,' she replied, 'if it does not enable one to be a providence where one loves? It must be but a poor sort of deity that is so limited in its power.'

'Do not aggravate grief by unfounded remorse,' he an-

swered. 'Rather let us consider this event as but a step in our mutual experience, and wait for the end, before judging its character or significance.'

'The end!' she exclaimed, sadly. 'It can only be worse than the rest. Come life or come death, I see only room for worse self-reproach and sharper bitterness. Why cannot I die? Your uncle, who had nothing wherewith to reproach himself, has made his escape and knows sorrow no more. Sophia is right, Edmund; we will not grieve for him.'

'Margaret, this is the first time I have ever seen you in a frame of mind that I cannot sympathise with.'

'It is the first time you have ever seen me in the presence of death. It is the second or third time that I have been in its presence; but at the others, I was a child, and simply wondered. Now, I dread to think of the next time!'

Noel saw that she was shaken from her usual serenity, and that other means were necessary to produce a reaction from the state into which she had fallen.

'It is very wonderful,' he remarked to her, 'to reflect how widely opposite are the extremes our nature can enclose. Sometimes, when after performing feats of mountaineering in the Alps I have dwelt awhile quietly in the valleys, I have found myself gazing with wonder and dread at the sharp peaks as they glittered far up in the sunlight, until I doubted the possibility of my having ever had daring and strength to climb them, and of my ever climbing them again. I forgot that the same exaltation of will, the same intensification of every faculty, would again carry me as safely to every altitude. What heights of being, what lofty ranges of feeling, have we traversed together! How have faith and love sustained us, as hand in hand we trod the thin crust of the red lava-current, flying with light steps o'er the surface, where but a few inches below or on each side all was molten and glowing! Ah, had it broken, and let us through! but, faith never shaken, and love never limited, were sufficient for the trial. Believe me, darling friend, what is called "repentance" is often nothing more than the timidity natural on reviewing in cool blood that which was achieved in hot. As well might the collapsed balloon shudder on thinking of its flight into heaven, after losing the inspiration which sustained its daring yet easy career. Honestly, now, you do not think you have committed a wrong. You but fancy so when you look from the point of view of some other

person, and that one who sees the outside only, and knows nought of the impelling motive. Man may not forgive, because man knows not all as we know it. But God cannot disapprove, because by God we mean one who does know all. He is our ideal of perfect goodness and perfect knowledge, and if that—if He—condemns not, what need to be troubled about the verdict of those who have not all the evidence, and who probably would not understand it if they had!'

Smiling sadly on him, she replied,—

'Our positions are not quite the same. But yet I am sure that wrong was never in my heart. Thanks, thanks; I will try not to be foolish, and make you unhappy again. I sometimes think that if I could be sure that you would never see me in any other light, I should regret nothing. I fear me that I have put in you the trust which ought to be put only in God.'

His reflections after leaving her were to this effect:

'I must write a tale that will show Margaret in what light she really appears to me. Words spoken are not enough. She requires the strong continuous light of words written. A sort of "Love and Duty," in prose. A tale of Love. A tale of Duty. Margaret's words seemed to presage a tale of Fate. Ah, how will it end?'

Noel was thinking of returning to England and setting to work in earnest in carrying out his newly-conceived idea. This, with his uncle's affairs, for he was left sole executor, would, he considered, worthily occupy all his time for months or years to come, and be no barrier to his absorption in the idea of Margaret. Truly, she was his divinity, and never did Buddhist yearn more towards his Nirvana. For him the life was wasted that had no reference to her. Even the enormous interests involved in his uncle's affairs were worth a thought only in so far as his own power to serve her might be affected thereby.

He was bidding good-bye to Margaret, when, in answer to his renewed offers of service, she said,—

'There is only one way by which you can really serve me. It is by getting yourself married. Yes, I mean it,' she continued, earnestly, and preventing his speaking; 'there will then be equal duties on both sides, and it will be better for all.'

'Perhaps you have found me a victim?' said Noel, somewhat crossly.

'No, I leave you free choice, believing you will not choose unwisely.'

'And you have no one in your mind?'

'I simply know this, that we shall both be happier and better when you have interests and duties to occupy you apart from me. I am not so foolish as to suppose that you can all at once go and fall in love at will, but I think you can give enough to any woman to make her happy, without much cost to yourself; and by honestly trying to love her, it will be sure to come.'

'You did not find it so in your own case.'

'I? I am not a woman, according to James; and I sometimes think he is right. But it always came easy to you to love. I have your own confession to that effect, you know,' she said, with an arch smile.

'Those miserable verses! Their contents are the best proof that they were not intended to be seen. But I shall not gratify you by telling you how far the imagined in them predominated over the real.'

'I do not blame you,' she returned. ('Nor do I hold it to be a defect in any one's disposition to be naturally so loving as to flow over readily to all objects that seem worthy.) Rather is it a defect in mine that I cannot love where I ought and wish most to do so. But with you, I hope and believe that it will be different. Beginning with respect and affection, you will easily go on to love, and then all will be well; and you will come to look back on the past as a dream.'

'I love my dreams too well to part from them so easily. But, tell me, is there any one that you have fixed upon for me?'

'You have plenty of choice in London. Keep in mind what it is you want, the kind of life and ambition, the pursuit of which will make you most happy and most useful; and surely among the multitude to be found in London drawing-rooms and in country houses you will find what you require.'

'You have become terribly practical of late. Is this from living with Sophia Bevan?'

'She thinks in this matter very much as I do, and no one could have your real good more at heart. I dare say that out of the numbers of people she knows, she could tell you of some one who would be suitable to you. Why not ask her?'

'Do you mean, ask her to have me herself?'

'No, I do not mean that. I do not think she approves of

you sufficiently to take you. She does not appreciate what she calls "dreamers." Sophia's conscience is a very particular one in some things. It would probably take more love to blind it than she would care, or, indeed, think right, to indulge. My meaning was, that you should consult her about some other. If she would take you herself, there would be a happy end of the search.'

'Well, Margaret, now that you have discharged your conscience in vain imaginings, we will talk about the actual. I am going to London to work at my uncle's affairs and my own. Where do you think of passing next winter?'

'My aunt,' she replied, 'is disinclined to return to Linnwood and its gaieties so soon after Mr Tresham's death, so that we shall, most likely, winter abroad together. My own wish is to go to Dresden and study the paintings there. But they say it is such a cold place. Sophia prefers either Rome or London.'

'James betrays no symptom yet of weariness at being alone?'

'His last letter makes me rather uneasy. It was much longer than the others. And my journal which I sent him with notes on the paintings and things we had seen, induced him to say that it made him wish to be back in Italy with me, to save me from making such blunders in my antiquities.'

'He loves you too well to spoil you by over-praise. But seriously, I really expect every shipment to be the last, things are getting so bad; and I cannot think what he will do if forced to discontinue his work. He knows now that the mine belongs to himself and to me in equal shares. How do you think he will be affected by my uncle's death? His position as half-proprietor is a different one to what it was?'

'It is impossible,' answered Margaret, 'to foresee his course. Put me out of the question, and you could have no more steady man to deal with. But—he may remember that he is married.'

'It is partly in the hope of making his work there a paramount consideration with him that I have told him the exact state of my uncle's affairs, and the consequent change in my own prospects. I know that for himself he cares nothing for money, and would not hesitate to sacrifice everything he has if he thought he could further the cause he espouses in Mexico. But when he finds of what importance the mine now is to both of us, he may be more careful.'

'Do you think there is any danger to himself in being there?' asked Margaret, anxiously.

'Not so long as he keeps to his work and uses ordinary caution. My principal fear is as to what he may be tempted to do if the contest approaches his own neighbourhood. But that is not likely.'

'I know little of James's affairs,' she said; 'but, tell me, has he an income if he leaves Mexico?'

'So long as I have one he has one,' responded Edmund; 'so do not be uneasy about that. If he can keep the mine going three or four years longer, we can sell it, and all be as rich as we can desire to be.'

'I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your thought for him,' she said. 'But neither he nor I could ever consent to be a burden to you. Not that I should object, if I were alone,' she hastened to add, for fear of paining him; 'I should be only too happy to have a right to spend your money. But, as I am, I cannot. Besides, there could be no need, for both James and I could earn money in England, if necessary. Oh yes, you need not look so incredulous. You do not know what I can do when I exert my will.'

Before he started she reminded him of her desire that he should marry, and indicated Sophia as a possible solution. He only replied,—

'Thanks, but I think you mistake her. What she wants just now is a secretary rather than a husband, for she is deep in correspondence with heaps of notables about her girl's college scheme. In the presence of interests of such magnitude matrimony would appear a frivolity.'

Sophia, however, was not so engrossed as to be neglectful of her friend's requirements. But she thought it best to venture only on a general remonstrance against his continued celibacy and desultoriness.

'A man must have a mooring-place to date from,' she urged. 'It is impossible even to kick without a point of resistance. You are no exception to mechanical laws.'

In reply to his pleading his diminished fortunes, she exclaimed,—

'You can't afford to marry? but you can afford to *be* married, I suppose! There are plenty of nice women who are not

paupers. You have only to make up your mind that it is a duty to be done, and set about it directly you get home.'

It was an immense delight to Noel to see how completely Margaret had won her aunt's love and approbation.

'She is the highest bred woman I ever knew,' Lady Bevan had said to him. 'Her demeanour as a young married woman, separated from her husband, is absolutely perfect.'

It was finally settled that they should winter abroad again, but the place was not determined upon.

CHAPTER V.

Noel's reflections as he travelled homewards across the Continent were of a very mingled character. The thought that James would probably be compelled to abandon Mexico, when he would of course rejoin Margaret, was like the stab of a knife to him, and suggested the possibility of still greater pain being in store for Margaret and himself than any they had yet endured. All this, however, lay in the future. His course for the present was clear. It must be his endeavour to keep Margaret up to the mark of the high feeling which had prompted all her actions towards him, and make impossible any pang that might arise through a doubt of his feeling. 'If she thought that I could for a moment look down upon her, and ascribe her condescension to any inferior motive, she would wither away and die.' So, in writing to her on his arrival in England, he said:—

'Supposing that, without James having expressed an earnest desire for you to experience an affection similar to that which he acknowledges, you had filled up the vacuum of your life by loving another; even then he would have had no right to reproach and worry you, for he would not have been robbed of your affection, since he has never succeeded in obtaining it. I sometimes try to conjecture what would be the result of a full explanation between you. For you and for me almost anything would be better than this life of suppression and repression. But for him? Is it not possible that he would be a greater,

better, and happier man in his admission of the unalterable disagreement of your natures, than in the alternate resignation and despair of his present state? And thus you would have peace, and perhaps under its influence and that of past memories, come to love him as he wishes! Ah, if I could transfer your love from myself to him so as to secure your happiness! I think I could yield even this my most precious possession, provided only I might die at the same time, to avoid the envy of his transports. But this is out of the question. Natures do not change. You will only cease to love me—or rather, you will only permit your love for me to be obscured, by allowing the accumulation of sufferings which that love may have brought upon you to hold the most prominent place in your mind. And, with a tinge of that sweet feminine superstition of which even you are not quite devoid, you will probably come to regard the suffering as a sort of deserved but inadequate atonement. Would that you could find comfort in the thought that our love, being true, and pure, and natural, and a love upwards, and with our highest aspirations, the wrong that makes it unlawful has a prior existence. (It is by human artificial laws only that any wrong whatever can be laid to our account, not by divine. And where the transgression is of feeling only, and not of action, where we do not "*make love*," but simply are "*in* love," surely in both human and divine estimation rather is the resistance honoured than the impulse condemned. (The excessive deference people pay to human laws, often indicates a lack of the regard due to human feeling.) Our mutual relations have lain outside of ordinary conventions, and our appeal is to a higher law than that of conventional society. It is more to be men and women than to be puppets of a fashion. For you, ascetic that you are by nature, the very fact of love being sweet is almost enough to make you think it wrong. Do not forget in all your estimates to make allowance for this individual peculiarity of yours. I think, too, that you are apt to over-estimate individual responsibility in regard to circumstances. It is the function of Providence to provide and arrange circumstances, and of character to determine our action under them. To go farther back, and seek to ascertain where the destiny that regulates character commences, is only to lose oneself in vain metaphysics. It is enough for us to think that the mere fact of our being placed in circumstances requiring capacity for our safe conduct and extrication, may only indicate the high opinion that Providence

has of our capacity. It would be useless to set a high and difficult task to a feeble and incompetent nature. It is only for those who can understand, and sympathise, and love, and dare, to foot the hairbreadth boundary of true and false, good and bad, life and death. When no longer in position to scan the abyss of danger from closest proximity, it may be a legitimate triumph for the moral nature to exult in the steadiness wherewith it has trodden the edge of the fearful precipice. Were there no difficulties and dangers in the world, there would be no heroes and heroines. Did the course of true love always run smooth, there would be no proved true lovers!

'What shall such utterances be styled? "Leaves from the Sibylla Persica," "Chapters from a lost Gospel," or "Verses from a new Apocalypse?"

'Can you guess in which of our moments together lately you suggested the following lines? They make a curious contrast to some which you may remember.

SONG.

Unkind, unkind, to make me love thee so,
When cruel fate forbids our paths to twine.
'Twas hard enough to bear my single woe,
Without the burden of thy love on mine.

Ah! love is sweet to those who may forget
All but the warmth and brightness of its ray:
But love to those who may not love, and yet
Cannot but love, is death in life for aye.

Always to think of thee as fond and kind;
Always to know a wide, wide world between;—
Oh, heaven, oh, why grant sight to one born blind,
If but to veil the blessed light once seen.

Like those who dwell in regions dark and cold,
And never knew a smiling earth and sky,—
I bore my lot; but oh, what grief untold,
To know, and long, and then return to die.

'Twas hard enough to feel life pass away,
Unloved, unloving, silence all, and gloom:
'Tis harder now to quit the joyous day,
And sink again into a living tomb.

Could'st thou, beloved one, less worthy prove,
Could'st thou to me less kind, less noble seem;
Perchance I then might cure this maddening love,
And rouse my soul from its sweet, bitter dream.

But no, but no, this cannot, must not be:
Faith, love, and trust are far too sweet to lose:
E'en without hope shall mem'ry cling to thee,
And ne'er one pang which love inflicts refuse.'

CHAPTER VI.

It was late in the autumn when Sophia wrote as follows to Noel from Rome:—

'What do you think, my dear Edmund, was Margaret's reason for objecting to come here? Solely because she had learnt Rome with James, and did not like visiting it without him. How much more good we women are to you men than you deserve! And what do you suppose made her change her mind? James again: at least, I suspect so, for she has engaged the master whose style of painting he most approved, and is working as if she had her living to make by it. Our coming here is the result of a sort of compromise. I didn't want to pass the winter away from all society, and Margaret said that if we went home, she would stay abroad and paint; and mamma, who is hardly up to Linnwood just now, was glad to fix upon Rome as reconciling all difficulties. I expect to meet a good many of my old chums here; and between the old and the new—I mean the antiquities and the visitors—I dare say I shall get on very well. Of course, you will manage to look in upon us at some time. I have heaps to talk to you about. My grand project, the one child whereby I seem to have any chance of surviving in my posterity, obstinately refuses to be born. Of course, I cannot carry out my plan alone, and everybody raises a fresh difficulty, until I begin to think that so far from England being a free country, we are the most servile people in the world. You always twitted me with my respect for conventionality, and hinted mysteriously at some standard, higher or deeper, or somewhere, which would be a better guide for poor bewildered mortality. But if you had read the letters I have received from people who are generally regarded as prodigies of liberalism, you would think that there is but one true faith, and that conventionality is its prophet. I had gradually enlarged my scheme until its prospectus included all the most recent suggestions, even that very nice one of Margaret's about a sick department for teaching nursing. With respect to the students, I proposed no restriction as to class or social rank, considering that, as with men it is the conduct and education that make the gentleman, so with us the mere fact of any girl having the means and desire to enter our university would make her a fit student.

Well, I am met on the very threshold by the demon of Caste. One correspondent asks, "Is it an institution for gentlewomen? because in that case you must not admit girls whose fathers are in business." I wrote back very civilly to request a definition of the term "business." "All who make money by buying and selling." I replied that I feared the definition was so comprehensive as to exclude the entire population of the country, inasmuch as the Queen and the dukes breed and sell horses, cattle, and sheep, and that my own surplus stock of game, poultry, and butter, is sent to the market. "That, of course," said the answer, "was not intended by 'business,' but people who have offices and shops." I was determined to make my correspondent, who is a very leading member of society, convict herself of absurdity; so I replied again that it seemed hard to exclude the daughters of bankers, merchants, artists, and all professional men up to the Lord Chancellor, and that I must request a still closer definition. It at last came down to her agreeing to the admission of all except the retail classes.

'This is no solitary instance, I assure you. On nearly all sides I am met by this question of class. "For whom is it intended?" And it is in vain that I reply by asking, "For whom are the universities we already have, intended?" Women, they say, are in an altogether different category to men. I took an interest not long ago in the formation of a sort of club for women who have to work at a distance from their homes, such as teachers, embroiderers, and painters, knowing that it would be an immense boon to them to have a resort of their own in the centre of their avocations—for I hoped they would gradually extend all over London—where they could pass their unoccupied time, and make engagements with employers. But the scheme broke down on the question whether the members should be allowed to receive visitors of the other sex. It was so essential, I considered, to give every facility for the making of engagements for work, and so conducive to propriety to have these engagements made under the eyes of their fellow-members, that I insisted on the point, and found myself deserted by the bulk of the projectors. Their objection was that ladies are not admitted as visitors to men's clubs! and that the engagements formed might be flirtatorial rather than industrial. And why, in the name of goodness, should they not be?

'Whose fault is it that all schemes for our especial benefit come to failure? Is it we women, or you men, that are so bad?

A friend of mine lately come from Washington tells me, that on his complimenting an American lady on the large amount of liberty accorded to her sex in the United States, as proving the goodness of the women there, she replied modestly,—

'"Oh no; it is the American *gentlemen* who are so moral."

'I cannot help thinking that there must be something very wrong in the relations of the sex with us, when every proposition for our benefit is met by objections of this nature. I do not see why our universities should not be as independent of men as yours are of women. We might accept help from you at first, until we raise professors from among ourselves. Though I don't see why tutors and masters should not be employed on the strength of pure merit, irrespective of sex. I know that men have a lurking belief that we are unable to take care of ourselves, and would be apt to fall a prey to those who do not mean well by us. But to bring us up with such an idea is surely not the way to foster independence among us. If the consequences of error are more serious to us, the knowledge of that very fact must tend to make us more cautious in the use of our independence. One of the results that I hope from my scheme is the gradual emancipation of girls from their present home slavery. You don't know what it is to be tied to the home, subject to the tyranny or caprice of parents or sisters, long after one has reached the age of discretion, simply because one is unmarried, and to be unable to follow one's own bent, or develop one's own individuality. Call women silly, weak, and emotional! I only wonder that most of us don't go out of our minds altogether under the treatment we receive. The brothers in a family go out into the world to fight their way and make homes for themselves, and to sink or swim, as the case may be; and the poor sisters are left to pine in idleness, and in envy of the more fortunate lot of their brothers; and for want of a congenial and healthy engrossment for their faculties, are too often tempted to accept offers of marriage from men who are altogether unworthy of them. You recognise but one career in life as open to us, and that is a career which depends upon your sweet wills to accord or to refuse us. I have read somewhere that the white population in America is even more degraded by slavery than the black. Is it not possible that men suffer more by the degradation of women than we ourselves do? Think about this, and you will see my meaning.

'I begin to suspect that my scheme will be a success only

when, by means of endowments, it offers the material inducement of scholarships and other emoluments to students. When parents find that their daughters can win honourable pecuniary rewards for themselves, they will withdraw their prejudices. It is not many mighty, not many noble, who will join us at first; but we shall gradually draw them in in time. It is no small revolution that I aim at, I can assure you; but I want to avoid making it ridiculous at starting, by setting up all kinds of pretensions on our behalf, which, for a long time at least, we certainly shall not be able to sustain.

CHAPTER VII.

THE letters received by Noel from Maynard indicated so much steadiness of purpose and feeling that it was with pain and surprise he heard from Sophia during the winter, that she wished all communication between Mexico and Rome could be stopped; for that whenever the mail brought a letter, Margaret was so completely upset by it as not to recover herself for several days afterwards.

'She says not a word to anybody,' wrote Sophia, 'but shuts herself up, neglects her self-imposed tasks, and looks wan and pale and patient, as if enduring overwhelming grief. If this be the result of being absent from one's husband, I hope that I shall either never be absent from mine, or never have one to be absent from. It cannot be that she is anxious about his health or safety, since your accounts are good. What can it be? Can she be fancying that she has anything to reproach herself with in respect to him? She will not own to repenting having left him, or having married him; and she is not one to indulge in unavailing regrets for what is only temporary. I hoped at one time that I should have helped her and mamma out of all our melancholinesses by means of the bright society of this place. We came here, it is true, meaning to be quiet and moderately sad. But, as usual with me, people came round us, and our circle grew, and I gradually found myself, this time really in spite of myself, surrounded by adorers, the cardinal A—— for my special slave, and heaps of clever men of all nations with

whom I talk and sing like a polyglot, and my only difficulty is to get a moment to myself. Margaret never appears in all this, and mamma but seldom. So I reign alone, a harmless candle to all these moths. Perhaps it is as well that it should be so, for I am positive that if she were to become known in our parties, the *furore* would take a different turn. The voluble plaudits for me would turn to silent admiration for her, and she would have no peace left. You see there is no reason that I can give for her retirement, so that I should be always having to make excuses for her absence, were she once to be seen in my *salon*. As it is, and in spite of her thick veil, she never walks with her little girls on the Pincian without the children being made an excuse by hosts of priests and monks for trying to get into conversation with her. It would not be accepted as any excuse for her seclusion that her husband is at a distance,—rather the contrary. Mamma, who has just come from her, says that she fears Margaret is giving way to a morbid presentiment of evil to James, for she acknowledges a growing weight at her heart that she cannot account for. What do you think of running over at Christmas and seeing what you can do with her? Adieu, for the present. I am off to a reception at the French Ambassadors'. Their parties are charming. A—— has promised to give me his opinion, (as a man, not as a cardinal,) about my girls' college. He is delightful, whatever people may say of his being saturnine and forbidding. The *scowl* does not make the monk.'

Noel did not need to go to Rome to learn the causes of Margaret's disquietude. He divined them but too well, and almost despaired, by aught that lay in his power, of restoring her to peace and happiness. However, he wrote thus to her:—

'I am thinking, beloved friend, that it is only fair, now that James and I are partners, that I should give him a holiday, by taking his place at the mine. Not, mind you, that he has said a word to show that he is tired of work, or wants a change. I think we both know him well enough to be sure that if I write to make such a proposition, he will refuse to avail himself of it. The only way to get him home is for me to go unannounced. Tell me, would such an arrangement add in the least to your happiness? I always try to read your heart, and think I do so pretty well, generally; but how is it in this instance? Am I not right in thinking that you, ignor-

ing yourself as usual, are fancying that you ought not to be away from him, and are even indulging in self-reproach in the matter? You will comprehend my proposal. It is not that your own happiness will directly be the greater for his coming; but you will be the happier in making a sacrifice to what you deem a duty, even though you be a sufferer thereby. I am as sure that I read you aright in this, as that you will not misconceive my motive. I wonder if you can quite comprehend what I am offering to do. Being what we are to each other, I am offering to go far away from you in order to send him to you! I can *do* this for you, but I must not let myself *think* about it, or I may fail. Write to me, something longer this time than the rare little notes which I keep by me and read and kiss often.'

This was her reply:—

'You ask for a long letter. Oh, my dear friend, what is the use? Does multiplication make words stronger and deeper? Forgive me if I do not seem to thank you enough for the offer. I understand it *all*. The feeling that prompts it is an atonement in itself—in part. You read me rightly. *It would do no good.* Either he would not come, or you would be too late. You may laugh at my superstition; but I feel that his plans are beyond being changed by us. You know that I pretend to a little second sight.

'There are so many things here that I should like to see with you, alone and quietly. But do not come, at least for the present. We cannot escape a crowd, and a crowd always desecrates Rome for me. I almost fear it desecrates the world—at least a fashionable crowd does. Sophia is queen of Rome this winter, and so enjoys her sovereignty. I see no one, go nowhere, save under cover of a thick long veil to the gardens with my darlings, or to some church. My dear aunt is all gentleness and consideration even for beings so wide apart in character and ways as Sophia and myself. She says it is a pleasure to her to recognise something of her own family in me. How differently Sophia and I see Rome! For me it would be perfect, if only I could believe! Repentance, confession, absolution,—is it any wonder that people long for a visible token of these? I fancy that I do not see anything so clearly as of old. When I was a girl, all externals of religion seemed to me superfluous so far as the soul was concerned.

Now I can understand people clinging to them. Is it that contact with the world dulls the spiritual vision? I used to disagree with the sentiment,—

> ' " Although the ocean's inmost heart be pure,
> Yet the salt fringe that daily licks the shore
> Is gross with sand."

I rebel against it now, for I see not why heart and world should not be pure alike. Is all life but a clouded crystal?

'Sophia came home from the French Embassy the other night in such a bad humour that I encouraged her to tell me what had occurred. It only turned out that she was angry with one of the cardinals for making fun of her enthusiasm on behalf of her sex. She had seriously asked his opinion and advice in reference to her girls' college, and he said, banteringly, that it would never do to raise the standard of women, as they are already so superior to the men that a little more elevation would put them out of reach altogether. And when she pressed for a serious answer, he said that there can be no greater mistake than to seek to widen a woman's mind at the expense of her heart; for that emotion is everything to women, intellect nothing. They can appreciate, but not emulate, man in his sphere, while man can appreciate, but not emulate, woman in hers. The gist of the remarks which so offended Sophia, was, so far as I understand them, to this effect. Cultivation must do more harm than good to women, because their special function is emotion; and it is the essence of emotion to be spontaneous; and cultivation destroys spontaneousness.

'Ah me! if cultivation would blunt feeling, what a boon would work be. As it is, it only lulls it into a brief forgetfulness, to return in redoubled strength afterwards.

'If I have been dilatory in replying to your most kind and thoughtful offer, do not think that it is because I am ungrateful. I have told you before that I always know when you are writing to me, and so am never taken by surprise by your letters. I was expecting this last one, and was wondering at its non-appearance, but did not like to make any inquiries. At last Sophia, in taking a bundle of letters out of one of her capacious pockets, exclaimed,—

' " Dear me, I quite forgot. Margaret, here is a letter for you which I was bringing up to you the other day, when something interrupted me, and it went into my pocket." Pray write more guardedly. I know all your feeling. Words are

not necessary. I do so dread any accident that might give *him* pain. This, as you know, has ever been my one restraining motive in all our relations. For me it has, perhaps too much, taken the place of all higher sense of duty; not that you will allow any other to be higher.

'But about yourself. Dear friend, need I tell you how much I wish and long for your happiness? Believe me, there is but one way to it. Look upon me as dead. But for the dull aching pain that is ever at my heart I should sometimes think I am dead. Cherish my memory as fondly as you may, but open your heart to the future. There is ample blessing in store for you, if you will only seek it thus. I assure you it will be to me an awakening into new life the day when you write to me of your happiness. I long for it intensely. I shall not continue to feel then that I have the ruin of your life upon me in addition to that of his.'

CHAPTER VIII.

NOEL'S astonishment may be imagined when, soon after, he read the following letter from Sophia Bevan:—

'James has surprised us all by arriving suddenly and unannounced. He says little that is intelligible by way of explanation to mamma or me; but asked first for you and Margaret; and looked rather disconcerted, not to say foolish, on learning that you are in England and have not been in Rome with us at all. Were I to describe his demeanour precisely as it appears to me, I should have to employ the epithet "surly." I will keep this a couple of days in hope of being able to write a more satisfactory report.

* * * * * * *

'James is coming round. He is more as I knew him of old, when he relapses into conversation. Oh dear, oh dear, what a puzzle it all is. I feel like Fatima, only without the keys. I have no Bluebeard to trust me so far. Margaret affects to be neither surprised nor put out; and mamma, who is not one-tenth part so clever as I am, exhibits all the serenity

of perfect knowledge; while I can only impatiently flatten the nose of my mind against the darkened windows of the mystery, without seeing anything. He says now that he has only run over for a short holiday, feeling that if England becomes embroiled with the United States, he should not be able to get away from Mexico later.

* * * * * * *

'I detain this to tell you of my luncheon party. It was a very smart one, I assure you; and think James must have been pleased with the sort of people he met. I told my cardinal, privately, all about him, and he, on his part, seemed rather flattered at being accepted as a sort of envoy from Mexico by a man so distinguished as A——. They talked a great deal together in Spanish; principally, I believe, about the prospects of the Intervention and the Church in Mexico. And James seems to have spoken pretty plainly, for the cardinal said to me afterwards that if everybody was of my friend's opinion, the Church would be a superfluity in other places than in Mexico.

'This conversation was private and did no harm; but I trembled at the delicate ground James ventured upon in the more general conversation. Fancy his discussing the Inquisition before the Princes of the Holy Roman Church! I did not observe what led to it, but he said that "while there has been a great deal of talk about the pains inflicted by the Inquisition, nothing has been said about the pleasures conferred by it. The delight of inflicting torture, especially in support of one's own opinions, which are, perhaps, incapable of being advanced in any other way, must be great enough to more than counterbalance its pains. There can be no doubt that if judges had the power of inflicting it now-a-days they would be always using it. Indeed one of them once admitted as much."

'It was Margaret's first appearance at any of our gaieties. James would not hear of any excuse; and, indeed, she could find none, since he has returned. He must have felt proud of the sensation she made. No one could credit her having been in Rome all this time, and making his absence a reason for seclusion. She seemed to me to be a little *distraite*, and trying to force herself to be gay. I shall write again soon.'

James wrote to Noel as follows:—

'I fancied you were in Rome, and came straight here. Is there any chance of your coming, or shall I come to England?

I wish to talk about the mine. But there is no need for haste. I have left things going on under the charge of the officials, whom you know; and the director of the neighbouring *Real* will give them advice if any difficulty arises. I have told them not to send any convoy down in my absence, unless the country becomes much quieter. I had a good deal of trouble to get the last, which I brought down with me, safe through. The struggle between the government and the invasion is a very desperate one. Juarez still holds the capital, but the promises held out by the French to the priestly party strengthen their hands so much as to make the fate of the country for the next few years very doubtful. Of the ultimate issue I have no doubt; but its date will depend on the conclusion of the American war. Neither party has yet molested the mining interests, beyond forcing a small loan, from which, by special grace of the President, I was exempted. I have directed that only sufficient silver for paying working expenses be made in my absence. The bulk is to stop at a stage short of market-condition. I shall be glad to see you again, and thank you for all your care of Margaret. She and I are quite at home together in Rome.'

'No, no,' said Noel to himself on reading this letter; 'the mine may wait. I am not going to Rome in order to behold him exercising ownership over Margaret. I fancy, from Sophia's account, that he is not having a very happy time of it. I wonder what brought him home just now. Oh, my poor darling,' he cried, as the full revelation of Margaret's position suddenly broke upon him, 'what suffering must be yours, and I thought for a moment of myself!' And laying his head upon the table, he gave way to a burst of irrepressible anguish.

When at length he recovered himself, he wrote to say that he was detained for the present by law business, and that it would be time to discuss the affairs of the mine when Maynard should come to England in the spring.

Thenceforth, Noel's book took a form so biographical in its character, and, though not less philosophic, so true to life, and that a real life of which he knew, that he never left a line of his manuscript on his table, never a page unsecured by lock and key, when he went out, lest the entry of any one in his absence might lead to the discovery of his secret, or to surmises that could bring nought but pain.

His new idea grew in its firm possession of him, and the ardour with which he followed it caused the weeks to pass uncounted, and enabled him to conquer the impulse that at times became almost too strong for him, of going to James and demanding Margaret of him.

It was a speciality of Noel's temperament to believe that to strong faith nothing was impossible. It betrayed its presence whenever he was under the influence of enthusiasm for any new project or idea. He felt that it needed only a supreme excitement of his will for him to be able to execute the loftiest purpose. Under such stimulus, he doubted not his ability to achieve a success in any line of conduct or art that would strike the cooler minds of mankind in general as a result of the highest genius. Such confidence was not conceit, though his expression of it might sometimes appear so, for no man could be more diffident of his own powers. It was the impelling force of his inspiration that spoke in him, an inspiration which he did not feel to be of himself. He was but as its instrument. When it spoke so mightily in him, he could not help ascribing to others a participation in its influence.

But there was a vast interval between the enthusiasm of Noel and that of the fanatic. With him, imagination was ever dominated by his reason. He was so far master of his delirium, as to be able to reason it down to practical limits whenever action was involved. Thus, when flushed with the idea of demanding from James the abandonment of Margaret to himself, he was able to reason thus:—

'If James believed that she would be happier with me, he loves her well enough to yield her. Then why should I hesitate? What law do we acknowledge but that of the heart? And he would be happier in his self-sacrifice for her. Nay, he might even think that she would feel such compassion for him in his loneliness, as to undergo a revulsion of feeling and come to love him with a love as intense as his own. What, then, could hinder? What, but Margaret herself? She would not accept his sacrifice. I am sure I do not read her wrongly in this. Here she would be adamant. The more her own love was involved, the more she would refuse to take advantage of his renunciation and agony. She could not be happy, knowing him to be wretched. James might consent to give her up, believing that she would return to him. But she, believing that he could not bear it, would not consent to be given up. This is certain.

There is, then, nothing to be done but to endure in silence, careful only to avoid aught that can add to their pain, and taking such means as I am able of proving to her my unlimited veneration and love.'

The winter was well advanced when Noel gathered from the following letter of Sophia's that James frequently manifested in regard to Margaret a degree of bitterness and irritability that was most distressing to Lady Bevan and herself. Noel tried in vain to conceal from himself that he derived a certain amount of satisfaction from the intelligence.

'I wish you would join us, for not only do I want you for myself, but I am quite sure that it would do James good to have you with him a bit. The mystery of his temperament surpasses my penetration, and when I attempt to make Margaret take him to task for his rudeness to her, she only says with a sad laugh that it is his way, and that I do not understand him. It is a new idea to me that bitterness and sarcasm should be the offspring of love and happiness, and I don't believe in it. However, I will say for him that he never misbehaves himself except when she is present. Get him away from her and he is perfectly charming. All the best people here insist on having him for interpreter and cicerone in their antiquarian expeditions. A grand one is being projected to visit the excavations at Ostia, and James has promised to go there as soon as some great stone thing which has just been reached, is sufficiently uncovered to allow of the inscriptions being read. Margaret has been obliged to quit her beloved seclusion and go about a good deal. He is evidently immensely proud to have her seen and admired, though he treats her, as I think, so badly. If he were my husband I should say plainly to him, "I don't go out with you until you learn to behave properly." I said as much to Margaret, but she made excuses for him, saying he is so good and clever that one must allow for a little eccentricity; and that if he seems cross it is only because he suffers. She hinted at climate as a cause, and said it was no matter so long as she was the only victim. But I heard of his saying something that makes me feel sure that all is not well between them, and that one or both has a hard time of it. One of our grandees ventured to compliment him on possessing perfection of soul, as well as of body, in his wife. He replied, with a smile of the grimmest descrip-

tion, that he must disclaim any compliment on such a score. The answer remained a puzzle to his auditor until a little afterwards, when, the name of some ancient Greek, or noble Roman, cropping up, James said that that was the sage who possessed a wife universally admired no less for her mental than for her bodily excellences, and who when remonstrated with on his getting divorced from her, took off his shoe and holding it up said, "Is not that a perfect shoe in shape and make and fashion? It is only the wearer that can tell where it pinches."

'Poor Margaret was present when James said this, and people only thought how secure in the confidence of mutual affection must the man be who can venture on such a speech before his wife. Was it to be expected that any woman could be happy with a son of Lord Littmass? But his oddest speech was just after this. It was a Coliseum party, and we were all resting in the shade sitting about on the broken steps when the same gentleman whose compliment had been repelled, thinking that James's speeches afforded a clue to his opinions, said to him,—

'"I see that your new English Court of Divorce has an approver in you."

'"Quite the reverse," answered James. "I consider that a husband's duty to his wife forbids his letting her go, however wretched she may be with him. Their failure to be happy as they intended, proves that it was the design of providence to make their marriage a discipline or a penance to them. And the husband has no business to thwart such design by letting her off."

'"A charming theory," said his interlocutor, "for any man who loves his wife so jealously and tormentingly as to make life a misery to her!"

'"You make happiness the test," replied James, with a degree of scorn in his tone; "and duties are to be deserted if two individuals happen to disagree with each other."

'The other answered with vivacity,—

'"Then, marriage being an institution for the promotion of human discipline, and not of human happiness, I hope I shall manage to remain single until I can kiss my rod with right good will." Here I broke in with,—

'"You are both wrong. Marriage is a duty. If happiness comes with it, so much the better, but you have no right to

neglect a duty simply because you happen not to like it. For myself I rather incline to an opinion I once heard somewhere, that every one ought to marry young and often."

'There was a laugh at this, and then, impelled, I suppose, by the genius of the place, we got talking about celibacy, and priesthoods, and convents, and vestals; when I said I thought it very funny that it should be held as great a crime to give life as to take it, and that I suspected it was a contrivance of the priests to make them and their sanction necessary. (We were not a very young party.) And the Prince di R——, a pleasant middle-aged man, said slyly that he suspected that the priests of old had a selfish motive in withdrawing young women from the world, and establishing such orders as that of the vestals, and surrounding them with mystery and romance for those who were outside. And then James said in reference to my speech, that the only mistake that had been made was in not making the giving of life a greater crime than destroying it; inasmuch as it is a greater responsibility to bring any one into this world than to dismiss him into the next. And he went on in that curious half-bantering, half-serious manner, which makes it impossible to say what his real opinions are, to tell us that the Manichæans of old held that the soul of the world diffused throughout matter is concentrated in man, who is a creation of the evil principle; and that the human body is a prison which is continually tightening the bonds of the soul, and so limiting and restraining God; and that in this view it might be a more virtuous action to take life than to give it.

'I answered him rather indignantly,—for I saw Margaret watching him with an expression of pain, and I thought of their own lovely little darlings,—that I preferred believing in one God to believing in two; and that if the Manichæans were right about man and the soul, such a process could be but a necessary part of the divine development, in order that by means of individualisation and antagonism there may be progression towards a higher result than is attainable by undivided unity.

'"A charmingly philosophical reason for all our differences," exclaimed the Prince; and then, as I hate being complimented when I am in earnest, and dislike holding my skirts so high as to expose any blue, I rose and broke up the party.

CHAPTER IX.

It was with no pleasant feelings that Noel took his way to Rome. As he approached his journey's end, it became pretty clear to him that he had much better have remained at home. His idea of diminishing in any degree Margaret's trouble either by relieving her of James's presence, or by producing in him a happier frame of mind, seemed more and more impracticable as he approached the city; and to take Sophia Bevan into his counsels could scarcely fail to lead to the very discovery he was most anxious to prevent.

His arrival was quite unexpected, except by Margaret, who owned that she had no reason, which could be called a reason, to look for him. It was a relief to him to find that only Lady Bevan and Margaret were at home, Sophia and James having gone with a party to Ostia, and being unlikely to return until next day. He was thus enabled to have a long conversation with Margaret, in which they discussed James's mental state and what steps were likely to lead to an improvement. She was very much distressed to find that his conduct had been observed by Sophia and others, for she had hoped that it was known only to herself.

'There is nothing to be done,' she said sadly, 'except for me to die, and let him marry some one who will by turns laugh at him, and take him seriously to task, and so help him to conquer his own morbid feelings. Indeed my departure would of itself restore him to a healthier tone. He is one to whom love in the present is torment, but its memory might be a blessing.'

They drove out in the afternoon. Margaret chose the Appian Way. The old street of tombs was her favourite drive. Lady Bevan declined to leave the house that day, so Noel sat beside Margaret, and on the opposite seat were her two little daughters. Their resemblance to their mother was more striking than ever. Noel ventured to say to her concerning them,—

'I should never be jealous of him, for they are all yours.'

'That is one thing that puzzles and angers James,' she replied, 'for he says they are all his, and yet they are like me.

But we must not talk or think in this direction. How wonderful to find ourselves thus again! It is like one more late summer's day on the eve of winter. But why did you come, and what do you mean to do?'

He told her that he came with a vague wild hope of benefiting her by drawing off James's thoughts, perhaps by taking him back to England. At any rate they would have plenty to discuss respecting their Mexican affairs. It was even possible that they might return to Mexico together.

'James says he won't go back without me,' she said, 'and I hardly think it desirable for him that he should.'

'You shall never return if I can help it,' exclaimed Noel, 'whether he goes or not. Rather than subject you to that life again, I will go and manage the mine myself, or sell it.'

She replied gently, but firmly, that she should shrink from no duty whatever to James, considering any devotion she could show him would be but a small compensation for the unhappiness which her failure of sympathy had brought upon his life. And then she renewed her entreaties to Noel to make an effort and detach himself from his present aimless existence, and seek a legitimate and possible career elsewhere.

'Believe me, I am not altogether unselfish in asking this of you,' she said; 'for my own position is far harder now, when to my own difficulties I have to add the thought of yours. You must not give me credit for a strength altogether superhuman. I feel very weak sometimes. There is no other way for you to help me.'

'You don't mean Sophia, this time?' he asked.

'Oh no, I have no one in my mind. I think the excitement of the selection and pursuit would do much to wean you from present ideas. But I must tell you of an unfortunate slip I made a few days ago. I quite deserved the scolding James gave me for it. Sophia came in and said, "Oh do tell me what I am to do. Here's the Prince di R—— wanting me to marry him, and I don't know what excuse to make."

'"Need you make any, my dear?" asked my aunt; while I,—forgetting myself and James, who was present,—cried out,

'"Marry! does he think you mad?"

'I must do James the justice to say that he restrained himself before the others as I never saw him do before, but it was only to make amends afterwards, and I am afraid he has not forgiven me yet. My aunt was so evidently shocked that

I added something about his being a foreigner and of a different religion.'

'And has she accepted him?'

'No, she has neither accepted nor refused him, decidedly. She told him that she likes him very well as a friend, but that she did not come to Rome to get a husband, and had no notion of marrying, at least for a great many years. And then, seeing him looking very serious, she set him off laughing by telling him in a funny way that she hoped he wouldn't go away in consequence, as he was a great addition to her parties, and helped to make agreeable society.'

'That is as much as to accept him,' said Noel.

'So we told her, but she said, "Oh no, these foreign princes don't mind that sort of thing. He thinks more of the convenience of having my two or three thousand a year added to his income than of anything else."'

'You know, I suppose, that you have been advising me to do that same mad thing?'

'Ah, I see. But my inconsistency is only apparent. It seems as impossible to me that you should be unhappy in your love, as that others should be happy. It is so different, too, for a man and for a woman.'

Next day the party returned from Ostia. Sophia was in ecstasies at finding Noel, and the meeting between him and Maynard was cordial as that of long-parted brothers. Presently Sophia began to Margaret,—

'I am afraid, my dear, you will never trust your husband to me again. I was so nearly the cause of his being killed. They had raised the Obelisk which we went to see, completely out of the ground, and had got one end suspended by ropes at some height in the air, and I asked James to read me the inscriptions. He was standing just below it and reaching up to try and make them out, when one of the workmen cautioned him to move from underneath, and he had scarcely done so when the ropes slipped or broke, and the immense mass came down with a crash. At first we all thought he must be crushed beneath it; for the cloud of dust hid him from our sight. But the workman's warning saved him, and we have all come back none the worse, except for the fright it gave us.'

Margaret showed the greatest solicitude, to which James, however, seemed indifferent; and Sophia went on to say that

instead of being thankful for his escape, he did nothing for nearly an hour afterwards but mutter to himself:—

'Nearly killed by an obelisk! nearly killed by an obelisk!' an exclamation of which she could not for her life see the joke.

'Do you see it?' she asked suddenly of Edmund.

Noel laughed, and said,

'Why, did you ever before hear of any one being killed by an obelisk? The very novelty is enough to account for any number of ejaculations. It is something to discover a new mode of death. Perhaps he thought it a particularly appropriate end for a life devoted, as so much of his has been, to antiquarian research. Those who take liberties with obelisks must expect to perish by obelisks. But why not ask himself.'

'So I did, but he looked oddly at me, and said he hoped I should never be nearly killed by an obelisk.'

'Where are you staying?' asked James.

'Close by, at the Europa.'

'Oh, but you must come here,' said Sophia. 'Our house has abundance of room. Mamma, how came you to let him go to an hotel?'

'Thanks,' said Edmund, 'there has been no lack of hospitality on Lady Bevan's part, I assure you. But I really prefer the hotel for the few days I am likely to remain in Rome.'

'Few days!' exclaimed Sophia. 'I hoped you had come to stay as long as we do.'

'No, I have seized a short holiday to run over and see Maynard.'

'And I have so much to show you,' said Sophia, in a tone of disappointment. 'At any rate, you will breakfast, and lunch, and dine, and everything with us, if you won't sleep.'

'Thanks, I dare say I shall contrive to give you enough of my company, but for to-night I want to carry off Maynard to dine with me, as we need not trouble you ladies with business.'

'The idea of anybody in Rome having business! But why can you not dine here, and talk in the interval?'

'Very good, then we will settle it so,' said Noel, glad to secure his point of staying at the hotel without farther battling; for he felt now a repugnance to sleeping under the same roof with James and Margaret, which he had not experienced in Mexico. And the feeling revealed to him the fact that his love for Margaret had reached a farther stage in its progress and development.

It was a relief to Maynard to get this first meeting over without any reference to the stratagem whereby he had sent Margaret home from Mexico under Noel's charge. In their conversation together after dinner neither of them alluded to it, James having determined not to broach the subject himself, and Noel having decided to leave him to surmise that he had forgotten the circumstance, until some turn of the conversation should make it impossible for him to ignore it, unless he were to do so intentionally; and this, Noel felt, would be even more distasteful to James than any direct reference to it.

They talked of Mr Tresham's death and the state of his affairs; of Mexico and its political situation; of the mine and its prospects; of the necessity that either of them should return to it; of Noel's own prospects and occupation; and, last of all, of that which was all the time uppermost in the minds of both, and a vast satisfaction and relief to Maynard it was to find that Noel treated his extraordinary step of sending Margaret home as he did, as entirely a matter of course, and the best and only thing he could have done.

'You may be sure, my dear fellow, we spoke often of you on board, and wondered what you were doing at such an hour and how you got on by yourself. Of course, Margaret was inclined to feel a little aggrieved at not being consulted in the choice of an escort, but she came round on considering the difficulties of your position, and thought far more of your loneliness than of her own situation. Since she joined her aunt I have been most thankful that things turned out so, for her society was the greatest comfort to my poor uncle in his last moments.'

Maynard derived vast relief from this free and unconcerned reference to matters that touched him so nearly; and on rising to go into the *salon* in obedience to Sophia's summons, he grasped Noel's hand in token of a friendship most sincere and affectionate. Noel felt a pang as he returned the pressure, but dismissed it at once, saying to himself,—

'I have no cause for self-reproach. He has been the happier through me. Rather should I shrink from him as Margaret's tormentor. But, poor fellow, he can't help himself, and he suffers also.'

'A pretty time for you gentlemen to sit over your wine,' was the greeting they received; 'but I suppose I must forgive

you under the circumstances. Poor Margaret is so upset by your escape, sir, that she has gone to bed. I don't see what more she could have done in your honour if you hadn't escaped. No, you are not to go to her. She really is suffering, and will be the better for being left alone.'

Sophia was but half right. It was true that Margaret was suffering, and that the accident to James was the cause; but no mere physical event could affect her in this way. The narrow escape from losing him, and the thought of the position she was so nearly being in at that moment, with him lying crushed and silent for ever, and no farther opportunity left to her to repair the wreck of his life's happiness,—these reflections came upon her in a flood of agony, on the surface of which floated only the dark cloud of her own self-reproach. Margaret was one who never justified herself. That she was in fault, was always her first feeling when anything went wrong with those with whom she had to do. Noel had discovered this peculiarity of her nature, and reminded her that she was now upon earth, and no longer in a sphere where love is omnipotent to keep all evil from the beloved; and that it was unreasonable to indulge in self-reproach for the limitations of her mortality. She said that she could not help it. It seemed to her that true love ought to conquer all things; else, what meaning had the symbol and the legend which she loved above all others,—the illumined cross and the '*in hoc signo vinces*,'—but the triumph of love even over death?

And, so, now she lay and tormented herself with the reflection that she had not done all that she might to make James happy. She forgot all those peculiarities of his nature which made it incongruous with her own; and while exalting him in her imagination as a perfection of which she was unworthy, she clothed her own spirit in the sackcloth and ashes of deepest humiliation, and longed for his approach that she might throw herself at his feet, ask pardon for the past, and promise to be to him all that he could wish in the future.

She was in the height of her exaltation when he entered her room. Springing forward she threw herself on his neck, exclaiming,—

'Oh, my darling husband, it seems as if I had never appreciated, never loved you till now when I have so nearly lost

you. You will forgive me all my past coldness, and believe that I have always at least tried to be what you wished.'

But the idea of her incapacity for love was too firmly fixed in his mind to be thus readily reversed. He uttered a short dry laugh and said,—

'I wish they had not told you. The accident was but a trifle, and had nothing in it worthy to effect a miracle and work the change of a nature. You are unwell and excited, and so fancy that you care for me. Never mind; go to sleep and forget it. You will be yourself in the morning. I promise not to remember it against you.'

'Oh James, how can you be so hard?' said she, quitting him and returning towards her bed.

'Have you forgotten all the lessons you have given me?' he asked, sarcastically; and leaving the room abruptly, he took his hat and cloak, and wandered forth over Rome, never resting or pausing until, some hours after midnight, he found himself sitting amid the ruins of the Coliseum, curiously watched by the French sentinel whose duty it was to guard the edifice from desecration and conspirators.

He sat there so long and motionless that the man several times approached him closely; but without speaking. At length he said,—

'Monsieur, it is forbidden to enter the ruins at night without a pass.'

'Ah, I forgot,' said James, starting. 'Tell me, is there a greater ruin than this, anywhere?'

'Assuredly, no, Monsieur.'

'Or anything harder than this stone I am sitting on?'

'Monsieur is pleased to joke.'

'You are wrong. There is a greater ruin here than the Coliseum, for there is the wreck of lives and the ruin of happiness. And there is something harder than this stone wherever there is a human heart, be it man's or woman's!'

'*Ah, la femme! Vous avez raison, Monsieur!*' and James, with a short laugh at the feeling revealed by the man's sympathetic tone, rose and bade him good night, and walked slowly homewards, thinking to himself that even in the agents of the ruins which he had been contemplating,—in the destroyers of the Coliseum and his own happiness,—there was a strange nearness of identity. For was not Margaret of the fair-haired races whose ruthless descent from the North had ravaged Italy of its power and its civilisation?

But James did not extend his analysis to himself. Neither did it occur to him to carry the parallel to its legitimate issue; or he might have seen that as Rome was, by virtue of its own inherent defects, a contributor to its own downfall, so in his indictment against Margaret as the source of his life's disappointment, his own temperament ought to be taken into account.

In this respect, probably as much as in any other, consisted an essential difference between James and Noel. The latter did not repudiate self-examination.

CHAPTER X.

'WHO is coming with me to see the Vatican by torchlight, this evening?' asked Sophia next morning. 'You will all come, will you not?'

'You must excuse me, my dear,' said Lady Bevan.

'But I shall excuse no one else, not even you, Margaret, for I see you are quite well to-day, and I should like to see you among the statues by torchlight. Of course, gentlemen, you will come, though I must make a bargain with James that he does not behave so ill as he has been in the habit of doing whenever we have been sight-seeing together, or he will quite shock the goodies of the party. Only think,' added she to Noel, 'how horrified some English clergymen must have been whom we found looking at the Apollo Belvedere, when he said aloud, as if for their benefit, in the grave tone of one lecturing students,—"Here you see a higher revelation of Deity to the pagans of antiquity than any that has been attained by the orthodox of our own time. We are taught to believe in a God who is baffled, and contends; who sacrifices, and strives; and who, after all his efforts, achieves but a partial success, and that at a huge cost. Whereas the maker of the Apollo rightly conceived of the divine as Power without effort. He represents him as a man in order to be intelligible to men, but a man that is also God in his ineffable calmness and grace. He destroys his enemy by a glance of his eye." And when we visited Gibson's studio he broke out into a tirade against the artist's practice of tinting his statues, telling him that the sculptor's

sole business is with Form, and that he ought to leave Colour to the painter; and asked him what he would think of a painter who should trench upon the sculptor's province, and say he could not paint properly on a flat surface. "And why tint only?" he asked. "Why not add wig and glass eyes? If you go so far, why stop there? The fabricator of the hair-dresser's dummy would hesitate to desecrate such beautiful and imperishable material by staining it. Rather would he hang on it a placard, as they used to do in the old plays for lack of scenery, and label the various parts, 'Here are the eyes,' or 'Here is the hair.' No, sir, such blasphemy against your art speaks you no true instructor of mankind." For once the poor old man was dumbfounded. I don't believe he will ever recover it.'

'I am afraid I was rather abrupt,' said Maynard, 'but I really was angry to see such splendid talent marred by such low conceits. If anybody had had the courage to say the same thing to him twenty years before, Gibson would have blessed him for ever afterwards. The fact is, he has been misled by examples belonging to a degenerate period, and has, like a good many others in other lines, mistaken decay for maturity.'

'Well, in that instance you may have been genuine in your utterances; at any rate I quite agreed with you. But how are we to reconcile the different views you expressed at the other two studios we visited the same day? Would you believe it, Edmund, he went into one where all was classic, Greek, and nude, and inveighed against the practice of copying other ages and ignoring our own? "If you must imitate the ancients," he said, "imitate them in this, in describing what you see. You don't see people going about without clothes now-a-days. Spectators can't even judge whether you are true to life, for the habits of the times give no opportunity of studying the human anatomy. You are appealing to an audience that is altogether incapable of comprehending you. You are as bad as the theologians. There is no God or Beauty for you in the world now. They are banished to a distant past, and must be dug out of an ancient grave. If our present costumes are ungraceful and hideous, so much the more reason to let people see what they make of themselves. If you really would earn the gratitude of your species, lose no time in making a Colossus, or Colossa, in Crinoline,—say a statue of the French Empress, or our own Queen; and expose it aloft in some conspicuous place. Per-

haps the shame of letting posterity know how we looked, would make us more careful in our fashions." And then he went into another, where everything was in modern style, and said just the opposite. I remember his exact words, for I wrote it all down when I got home, as I always do when I hear anything worth remembering. He spoke more quietly, as if his mood of opposition had nearly worked itself out, and said to the artist, though in a sarcastic tone that made me suspect his seriousness, —"You take people with their clothes on so well as to make me wish you had adopted a more classic style. It is such a relief in these days, when all Europe wears clothes, to see something like real humanity occasionally. It must be the highest aim of art to represent, not so much what we appear to be, as what we are, or ought to be; our better selves rather than our accidental envelopes. There is no mightier agent in man's redemption than a glimpse of the beautiful and the true." What provoked me was to find that however flatly he contradicted himself, I always agreed with him.'

'You cannot have a better test of truth,' said James, laughing heartily at the vivacity of her narration. 'It shows it to be truth all round, and not merely on one side. Look from whichever way you may, you see the same mountain of Truth, various in its aspects as any mountain of hills; yet the same mountain always.'

'Was that the way he behaved when you first saw Rome with him, Margaret?'

'I do not think I ever saw Rome with him before,' she said, shaking her head doubtfully.

They looked inquiringly at her, and she added,—

'It was quite a different sort of person who first opened Rome and its meaning to me. James will scarcely deny that.'

'It is possible,' he said, 'that one of us has undergone a change; but if the effect is on one side, the cause is probably on the other.'

Here Sophia created a diversion, saying that she and Margaret were going to visit the graves of Keats and Shelley in the English cemetery, and asking who would accompany them.

'I think Noel and I can spend our time better than among tombs,' said Maynard; 'but there is no reason why you should not seek exhilaration there. Shelley was a noble young fellow, but very crude and wild; and Keats was very morbid.'

Here a visitor was announced, an old *habitué* of Rome. On hearing the subject of discussion, he at once volunteered to accompany the two ladies. This set Maynard and Noel free; and they went out together on a quest more interesting to them than that of modern epitaphs, for they were bent upon tracing the resemblance between certain Mexican and Roman antiquities, with a view to obtaining light concerning the identity in origin or principle subsisting between the primitive religious ideas of the two worlds, the old and the new; and tracing step by step both backwards and forwards the real history of the Dogma of 1854; a dogma which, in James's view, was a leading article in that system of eclecticism which had been growing from before the days of Zoroaster and Melchisedek, until it culminated in modern Catholicism.

'Well, gentlemen,' was Sophia's greeting when they re-assembled for dinner; 'we have to thank you for a most admirable chaperon. There is such a charming corner in the cemetery that Margaret took quite a fancy for being buried there; but it is tenanted already, Mr F—— said, by a young Englishman who had taken a like fancy to it, and determined to purchase the spot for himself, but found it was already disposed of to some one who had been similarly affected. Well, the young Englishman, who had a reputation for singular self-will and eccentricity, gave the owner no peace until he consented to an agreement that it should be the property of whichever of them died first. And next day he went out hunting and was killed, as if for the express purpose of making his purchase available. Mr F—— told us a story of him, which makes such a supposition quite possible. Being remonstrated with once by a friend for some extravagance of behaviour, he said,—

'"The doctors assure me that I have dislocated or cracked one of the vertebræ in my neck, by a fall in hunting, and that if I turn my head suddenly I shall probably drop down dead. Now I tell you what it is; I don't like being spoken to as you have just spoken to me; and if you do so again, I *will* turn my head suddenly and *will* drop down dead, and my death shall lie at your door." And those who knew him say there is no reason to doubt that he would have kept his word.'

'It might be a useful faculty,' remarked Maynard, 'to be able to terminate one's existence at will; but I suspect that the world would be very soon depopulated if men found that they could escape from a chagrin so readily.'

'It is a horrible story,' said Margaret; 'but I hope that no one would be deterred from performing a duty and administering a friendly rebuke or remonstrance by such a threat. The death would not have lain at the friend's door; neither would it have imposed any responsibility or obligation towards the other's memory. The very barbarism of the act would acquit of that.'

Maynard said, in a somewhat hesitating, awkward way, that eccentricity might approach so nearly to insanity as to make it difficult to decide the responsibility of a man under such circumstances; and while Sophia was struck with painful amazement at the matured and decided character of the opinion expressed by Margaret, Noel saw in it a proof of unabated bitterness in her relations with James.

CHAPTER XI.

Noel had not been many days in Rome before he was convinced that he was powerless to interpose between his friends and the fate that destined them to misery. That, he felt, must work itself out. All that he could do was to stand by ready to be a willing instrument in its hands for affording any amelioration to their situation.

So he gladly availed himself of a summons from his solicitor to return to London, leaving Margaret equally assured of his devotion, James of his friendship, and Sophia in the dark as to the mystery of the lives around her.

'We shall return home together in the spring,' said the latter to Noel as he took his leave; 'and then you must all come to Linnwood for a month before we go up to London for the season.' For it had been agreed between Maynard and Noel that it would be better to delay the return to Mexico until the country became more settled.

Back in his London abode, Noel resumed his task, with interest intensified by witnessing the spectacle of the renewed woes of his idol. In addition to being the subject of his work, she became more and more its object. The degree in which

she was affected by James's narrow escape at Ostia was such as to suggest to him the greatest fear for her should anything really serious happen. From seeking 'to assert eternal providence and justify the ways of God to man,' as manifested in the development of the spiritual and emotional in humanity, his design gradually assumed the form of an attempt to assert the glories of Womanhood as revealed to him in her whom he loved, and justify Margaret to herself. This he felt to be a harder task than the other, inasmuch as she was one who refused to be judged by any standard below that of her own lofty perceptions of perfect right: and no standard such as this could be justly applicable to aught human, inasmuch as it postulated superhuman insight and power to act up to its requirements. Reversing the old utterance of self-complacency, her feeling rather was, 'Others may applaud me, but that is nothing if I condemn myself.' And Margaret, he perceived, condemned herself for having a nature that was amenable to temptation, even though she possessed also the power of successfully resisting it.

Since Mr Tresham's death his affairs had been put into Chancery, and there they seemed likely to remain; for Noel would make no step towards either payment or compromise, and the hostile Banks either would not or dared not accept the challenge to produce their minutes. Finding this to be the case, his lawyers said to him, 'Wait,' and he waited, nothing loath to be free from work that was little congenial to him, and to pursue his own occupation. Once only was his interest aroused. An attempt was made to bring the Mexican property into the list of his uncle's assets, by representing that the deed of gift was executed subsequently to his being in difficulties. This was a matter that most seriously affected James and Margaret, and Noel set himself to work with an energy and determination that surprised and delighted his lawyers, and was rewarded by being enabled to establish the deed most satisfactorily, and without letting those who were most concerned be made aware of their danger.

Early in May he received this letter from Sophia Bevan:—

'Paris, May, 1863.

'A few days more, dear Edmund, and I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you. A real relief it will be to me, I assure you, after my long and painful proximity to wedded incon-

gruity. I never knew before what wonderful beings men and women are; or rather what wonderful complexities matrimony is capable of effecting. Here, in James and Margaret, are the two best and noblest natures I know; and, taking them separately, I am in love with each of them: yet, combined, they can't combine. Like two prime elements, each is perfect and complete by itself, but seems absolutely incapable of affinity or union with the other. The odd part of it is, that I verily believe both do their very best to promote the desired accord, the absence of which constitutes the misery of their lives. I begin to think that it is possible to try overmuch to be good. Here is a triumph for you over poor me. You always insisted on spontaneousness being the essential basis of everything desirable, and laughed at my belief in the omnipotence of Will in the case of feeling. I suppose I do not know what love is, and have in my imagination substituted getting-on-comfortably-together for it. I only hope I never may know what love is, if the presence or the lack of it is to put me in the position I am lamenting. Margaret is ever silent and patient. It is through the half-utterances of James that I am forced to see in her a picture of affection mingled with repulsion; and in him, of idolatry mingled alternately with anger and remorse. She loves him with a love that he rejects. He loves her with a passion that she cannot comprehend. I never before appreciated the beauty of Divorce. Not, mind you, that I think it applicable to their case; at least *now;* though it is impossible to say how far the *idea* of such a resource being available might in the first instance have educated him into reason and moderation. They prefer to suffer on, and attempt impossible conquests, she over herself, he over her, rather than finally admit their failure. There is something beyond the enactment, conventional or ecclesiastical, that binds them. They are as far above paying regard to fetters of that kind, as they are above vulgar expedients. I doubt if they really know what it is that keeps them together. I believe that it is, unconsciously to them, the bond of parenthood; and that but for this he would release—no, not release,—force her from him, for she would not quit him without compulsion, at least for her own sake. His one solace is that he believes her to be, by some defect of nature, incapable of love. In the agony of his mortification he has even said that he wished she might experience the passion, no matter for whom, and then she would

pity and, perchance, love him! I have exhausted my imagination in devising remedies, and think now that their best chance of happiness lies in a separation that shall continue until they are both old enough to have lost their individual angles.

'He is really an extraordinary man, and it was the most perverse fate that, of all natures in the world, brought two such as these together. Only fate that created the dilemma can solve it. I never fail to learn from him something deeper and broader than I can find elsewhere. He has given me most admirable advice about my pet project which I will not now repeat. Get him away from his personal engrossments, and no man surpasses him. But I can see that he often allows his own experience to influence his philosophy. My university, he says, will be invaluable for those women who are by temperament disqualified for marriage. He would have me introduce a system of what he calls "spinsterial fellowships." He thinks it essential that women be made as independent and able to take care of themselves as men are; and that they should have such ample resource of occupation as to lead them to regard marriage as but one out of many careers open to them; in fact, just as men do. So that if a woman feel that she has no vocation for matrimony she may withdraw herself from being a temptation and attraction to men, to a sphere of usefulness among her own sex. I suppose he thinks that Margaret would have gone to such a university as a student, and remained there all her life as fellow and tutor.

'Sometimes his bitterness shows itself in quaint sarcasms on the people and things we see on our route. His religious and scientific ideas are oddly mixed up together, so that I can never make out exactly what his belief is. He expresses a scientific view of prayer, and says he sees no reason why spiritual forces should not effect physical results. It is only necessary to postulate an additional imponderable medium, say like that which is the agent in attraction or electricity, and amenable to the human will or wish, to be able to comprehend the mind's acting at a distance. The phenomena of sympathy, antipathy, presentiments, and the like, belong to a region of which nothing is yet known: and denial is just as unphilosophic as assertion, ridicule as credulity, concerning them. Prayer may be but a link in the chain of natural causes, the desire that prompts it being itself the sign and agent of a tendency toward the end desired and essential to such end.

'He was talking in this way while we were driving through an Austrian village, when something about the carriage gave way, and we had to stop for repairs. The workmen were very stupid, and the peasants who flocked round us were certainly of painfully unintelligent countenances. James said that he never goes among country folk without thinking of the injunction to the Disciples. "Like them, we have only to go into a village to 'find an ass tied' in the bondage of hopeless ignorance and superstition. The villagers, or 'pagans,' or 'heathens,' remained in their old habits out of sheer stupidity, long after the cities became Christian. And they will remain Christian for the same reason long after the cities have proceeded to the next phase in religious development. So that the Christians will in turn appear as 'pagans.'"

'We came by Dresden, Margaret being anxious to see the galleries. They are indeed splendid; and James was very nice, except once when he horrified a party of priests who were looking at the Sistine Madonna, by remarks even worse than those he made in the Vatican.

'The voyage down the Elbe through the "Saxon Schweitz" is most lovely. Margaret sat apart for some time gazing at it, her eyes filled with tears. James seemed too hard upon her for saying that when amid beautiful scenery she always felt herself a child again. Some charming choruses sung by a party of students on board aided her melancholy. James said it was all "race," and that she is a thorough Teuton.

'At Cologne they considered two things to be worth seeing. The Cathedral, and the crucifixion of St Peter with his head downwards, by Rubens. A picture powerful enough to be horrid, I thought. But what could James have meant when he muttered as he gazed at it,—

'"A fitting symbol of the system that exalts celibacy and forbids to marry?"

'We purpose to be at home in just ten days hence, going direct by Havre and Southampton. Do, if you can possibly manage it, meet us at Linnwood on our arrival.'

CHAPTER XII.

NOEL determined to avail himself in part of Sophia's invitation; and to take a holiday from his work, to which he had been applying himself closely for some time. He did not feel disposed to take up his quarters at Linnwood, but determined to make some contemplated changes in his own house and grounds a pretext for living at home. He preferred the freedom left him by such an arrangement, and about a week after the receipt of Sophia's letter, he set off for Devonshire, in order to commence such operations as would justify his pretext.

Leaving London in the afternoon, it was late when he reached Salisbury, and soon after a solitary meal at his hotel, he went to bed, for the night was one of the stormiest description, the boisterous wind and driving torrents of rain utterly forbidding his usual evening stroll with his cigar.

Not that he omitted his cigar on this occasion. It was too good a friend, in the moderation with which he used it, to be neglected, when the end of another day, and the solitude of a country coffee-room, stimulated meditation. As the soothing effect of the herb crept over Noel on this occasion he thought—

'If only James would smoke, he would be a happier man, and Margaret would know a little peace.'

The prospect of so soon again seeing them, filled him with conflicting emotions. Of late he had to some extent succeeded in diverting his attention from a situation which he felt to be hopeless, and fixing it upon his writing. He had somehow come to regard this as in some way connected with the future of Margaret and himself. Whatever might be the issue of their aimless and uncalculating attachment, a time might come when it would at least be to her a satisfaction and a solace to be assured that his feeling for her was one of deepest unvarying veneration.

As the time approached for his departure next morning, he was made aware of something being out of course in the hotel, and while superintending the moving of his baggage in the hall, Sophia Bevan came down-stairs in a state of excitement and anxiety. Catching sight of him she exclaimed,—

'Oh, this is fortunate. You can be of use to us. We have come home rather sooner than we expected, and are all on our way to Linnwood. But James went out last night, after we

had all gone to bed, and has not returned yet, and we were to go by the next train.'

'What does Margaret say?'

'She is not so alarmed as I am, because she says he often goes out in the same way, but she never knew him stay so long before.'

'Can I see her?'

'Oh yes, do. And try to rouse her out of that preternatural calm.'

Noel entered the sitting-room, where she was alone.

She rose mechanically to meet him, pale, and without a particle of animation in her rigid face.

Taking her two hands in his, he held them firmly, and gazed intently into her face for some moments without speaking. Gradually she seemed to come back to herself, for she drew a deep breath, and manifested more consciousness.

'What do you fear?' he asked, in a low tone.

'I do not know. But I have a dead weight upon me that crushes my heart.' And she gasped, and said, 'I can hardly breathe.'

'Your train is just ready. Will you go on with your aunt and Sophia, and trust me to look for him and bring him on afterwards?'

She hesitated: so he added,—

'He would prefer it so, and it is best for the children. They must not be travelling late at night in this weather.'

She looked intently at him for a moment, as if to divine his thought, and as if about to insist on making the search with him. But she restrained herself and said, 'I will do as you bid me, and trust all to you.'

Noel went to Sophia, and told her that he had prevailed on Margaret to go with them by the train appointed. Sophia said with asperity,—

'Quite right of her. A husband who behaves so has no right to be considered. What is your idea?'

'I am going to wait for him, and bring him on with me. He had acquaintances in the neighbourhood. Perhaps I may go out and inquire for him.'

As soon as the party had started, Noel ordered a carriage to be got ready, with driver and groom. Placing in it his railway rug, and a flask of brandy, he bade them drive as fast as possible to Stonehenge. He had an idea, but he kept it strictly to him-

self. His only cause for real anxiety on his friend's behalf arose from the terrible inclemency of the night. He was deterred from taking a doctor with him by the consideration that James would not like his eccentricity exposed.

Arrived at the Avenue, Noel bade the carriage wait, and advanced on foot to the circle of stones.

'Grand as ever in their eternal loneliness, and showing no trace of tempest or man.' This was his first thought as he entered the inner circle.

'But surely I miss one,' he thought, presently. 'Yes, the great stone that James especially pointed out to me as the next one to go, it already leant over so. It has fallen since we were here, after standing—who shall say how many thousands, or tens of thousands of years.'

And he stood beside the recumbent monster, and noted the aspect of the earth thrown up at the base in the fall, and the indentation in the soil, the softening of which by the rains had evidently caused the catastrophe. And the water filled all the hollows up to the rim round the edges of the stone at its base.

'It has not been down many days, perhaps not many hours. In a little while it will look as if it had been down for ages.'

His next thought was,—

'What a sad omen for James! Stonehenge has for me always seemed in some way connected with him and his destiny. It was on yonder altar-stone he stood when he told me that to the lessons learnt here, he owed all the joy and hope of his life, for here was opened to him the mystery of humanity. How soon was his joy of hope changed into bitterness of realisation? It would have been better for his happiness had this prostrate mass been then at once his monument and sarcophagus—token of introduction to the passionless life of spirits, instead of the glowing world of flesh and blood.' And the tears started from Noel's eyes, and dropped upon the stone by which he stood, as he thought of the noble character and unhappy destiny of the friend with whose career his own was so painfully involved.

'But I must continue my search till I succeed, or how can I meet Margaret? If James returns to the hotel in my absence, and finds her gone without him, he may pursue her with a storm of reproaches. To judge by her woe-stricken look of this morning, it would not take much to kill her. Her heart seemed well nigh broken. That deadly weight upon it, of which she spoke,

seemed to indicate the breaking of the spring, and the crushing out of vitality. Happier would it be for her, too, were this stone her tomb. Ah! could it have meant—could her feeling have been sympathetic of reality? If James did, as I surmised, wander hither, and if the stone did fall in the night, what more likely than that he should have taken refuge under its lea from the driving storm, and—and——'

And Noel gasped with agony, and big drops of sweat rolled down from his brow as the idea broke upon him with the might as of a sudden revelation, that there, beneath that ponderous load, was lying the body of James Maynard, suffocated, crushed, and dead! and he had been already weeping unconsciously over his grave!

Filled with the dreadful idea, he was about to summon his attendants to aid him in lifting the superincumbent mass. But he at once saw the folly of such a notion. 'It would be easier to dig under it,' he reflected, 'and if he be really there, to draw him out.' Walking round and peering in at the edges, he sought for any indication of projecting clothing, but in vain. This, however, proved nothing; for the stone was of ample length and width to cover and hide a human figure.

Then he thought,—

'If he is not here, why should I create an excitement which would rouse the whole neighbourhood, and expose him to public curiosity?'

Then he took out his pocket-book, and commenced writing some instructions for his attendants to take to the town, while he himself remained by the stone, for in his present state of feeling he could not bear to leave the spot. They were to inquire at the hotel if Mr Maynard had returned; and in case he had not, they were to despatch men with appliances either for raising the stone or digging under it. Then he reflected that if by any chance James had returned, there was no need for him to be waiting at Stonehenge till the carriage should bring back word thereof.

'No fear of the stone being molested in my absence. I will go myself. If he has not made his appearance, I will return with a staff of men, as if to indulge a whim of my own, and restore the stone to its former position.'

Upon this thought he acted: first taking the precaution of asking his driver if he knew of any stone having fallen lately. The man said that he believed none had fallen for near a hun-

dred years; he had brought a party there the day before yesterday, and no one had mentioned such a thing.

Noel's anxiety, as he approached the hotel, became intense. Repelling the idea which had lately taken possession of him, he looked eagerly forward, fully expecting to see Maynard standing at the entrance waiting for him. His heart sank as he saw its deserted look, and learned that nothing had been heard of him.

Adhering to his plan of secrecy, Noel said that he should probably not leave Salisbury that day; certainly not before the evening; and having ordered his dinner for a late hour, he inquired for the principal builder in the town.

'I have just been visiting a favourite spot of mine, Stonehenge, and have found that one of the principal stones has lately fallen—most likely only last night, through the softening of the ground by the rain.'

'Is it the tall stone that stands by itself, and is called by some the astronomical stone? The one that leans over so much?'

'Yes. You know Stonehenge well, then?'

'Oh yes: I have often thought that stone would be the next to come down, if any did.'

'Well, my intention is to set it up again. And I want you to do it for me, at once.'

'It will be a heavy job. And you must have permission from the lord of the manor to do anything with Stonehenge.'

'You need anticipate no difficulty on that head. The responsibility and expense rest with me. My plan is to dig the foundation somewhat deeper than it was before, raise the end of the stone with levers and a derrick, and let it slip back into its place. But it must be done this afternoon.'

'I made a calculation once, of the weight of that stone,' said the man, after reflecting for a few moments, 'and if I remember rightly, it came to near sixteen tons.'

'But it will be necessary to lift only one end from the ground, and prop it up as it is raised, until it is sufficiently upright to fall into its proper position.'

'True, sir; I can do it. The men are at their dinner now. As soon as they come in, they shall put the derrick and poles in the waggon, and get ready to start. We can't get there much before four o'clock.'

'Well, be as speedy as you can, and I will meet you there.

I want to leave by the last train for the west, and shall be glad if I see the job finished first.'

'I will do my best, sir; but it may be more troublesome than we expect,' said the man. And Noel returned to his hotel, to endeavour to eat some luncheon, and to control his anxiety as he best might, until it should be time to set off again for Stonehenge. Even should James happily appear in the mean time, he would not countermand his orders, but allow the work of restoration to be effected, as the laudable fancy of an enthusiast.

Before starting, he wrote a note to tell Maynard he would find him at Stonehenge any time in the afternoon, and what he was doing there. This he left at the hotel, to be given to James in case he should return during his absence.

It was nearly five o'clock when Noel found himself again on the spot, surrounded by a strong party of labourers. Having conferred with their master, and decided on a plan of operations, he seated himself on the prostrate altar, and watched every movement in an agony of suspense. It was only by a strong effort of his mind that he succeeded in controlling an emotion which, for the present, at least, could not but appear unintelligible and uncalled-for to others. The very merriment indulged in by the men, helped him to encourage the reflection that his mood was rather that of a madman. For anything he knew, he suddenly reflected, the stone might have been down for days or for weeks. He had no sure evidence on this point. The rains had been heavy enough to make all traces indistinct, and now, by the depth of the indentation made in the earth, he began to feel certain that it must be so.

These reflections helped to keep him from betraying his anxiety, as a series of fulcrums were placed at the sides and head of the stone, and strong beams for levers were inserted into apertures dug out to receive them beneath the edges, and men stood by ready to thrust supports underneath, to prevent the stone, when raised a bit, from falling back, and the effort being wasted.

'Ascertain first,' Noel had said, 'whether you have sufficient lifting power. It will then be time enough to dig out the new foundation.'

The first effort merely loosened the mass slightly in its bed. The water beneath made a loud sucking noise, showing that, by excluding the air, it helped to keep the stone down. A renewed

pressure applied to the levers enabled the ends of some broad planks to be thrust beneath the head of the stone. The next effort, a few more planks there, and some also beneath the sides. The hollow beneath, so far as could be judged from the appearance near the edges, was filled with muddy water.

While this was going on, Noel had slipped quietly down from his seat on the altar, and was lying on the ground, so as to be able to peer under the stone whenever the levers for an instant swayed it upwards. But nothing in his demeanour betrayed to the bystanders more than a natural curiosity and interest.

Partly for Maynard's sake, partly for the credit of his own sanity, he endeavoured so to conduct himself, that whatever the event might be, his demeanour should be regarded as natural and explicable. Should it prove that his worst apprehensions were unfounded, he would thus avoid exciting surmises about the disappearance of James. If the body really were there, he would escape being charged with indifference.

Comparing the direction in which the stone leant and fell, with the direction of the previous night's storm, Noel felt certain that any one seeking shelter there would have got directly beneath it, and close to its base. Since, then, the stone was nearly twenty feet in length, a human figure crouching close to the base could not reach within fifteen feet of the end which was being raised, so that it must be lifted several feet from the ground, before it was possible to see far enough under to make any discovery. So Noel got up, and gazed awhile across the plain. What if he could see Maynard approaching!

Even in this case he determined to keep his idea to himself, greet him with a quiet welcome to aid in the restoration of Stonehenge, and never tell what was in his mind, unless some day a long time off, when all were old together, and he could tell it as a curious anecdote of the almost forgotten past.

Noel next thought of the position a man would be likely to adopt when seeking such a shelter. A chance wayfarer, caught in a flying storm, would crouch close at the foot. But the storm had lasted all the evening, and all night, and Maynard would have been wet through and through before he reached the place. It would be, not so much for the sake of the shelter that he would have laid himself down there, as to meditate undisturbed by the rushing, beating tempest. Yes, he would have lain down at full length, perhaps resting his head upon

his arm, and perhaps even falling asleep; or, chilled and numbed into insensibility, he might have perished of cold and wet even before the stone's descent.

There was another chance, however, of which Noel was not forgetful. The descent of such a mass would, in the first instance, and as the earth began to give way, be so gradual as to allow of a person beneath becoming aware of it in time to escape. It might be that James had been caught in such an attempt, and crushed near the end or one of the sides.

So Noel returned to his position on the ground, and watched intently. The idea that, if there at all, James had been crushed while lying exhausted and insensible at the stone's base, grew strongly upon him; so that he longed to reverse the operation, and raise the opposite end first. But this was so inconsistent with the sole reason he could give for moving the stone at all, that he compelled himself to withstand the impulse.

The great length of the stone led to this result. When the end was raised four feet off the ground, the centre would be but two feet from it; and at five feet from the base the space would be but one foot. It was owing to the indentation in the ground that this interval of a foot was not sufficient to allow of Noel's seeing beneath the stone there. The cavity was still dark, and as they raised the stone the muddy water ran into it.

'It is a longer job than I expected,' said Noel to the working party; 'but if you don't mind for once working after hours, I will make it up to you.'

'We will work till dark, sir; but I don't think we shall make a finish of it by that time,' said their chief.

A few more applications of pressure enabled Noel to see under the portion of the stone that was near the base. He fancied it was darker there than was quite warranted by the shadow and the falling evening.

Between his anxiety and his judgment, he distrusted his own eyesight. Beckoning to the master, he asked him to look under also, and see how dark it was there.

The man looked, and rose without making any remark, and bade his men raise their fulcrums so as to make a greater hoist at the next pressure, and to thrust the supports as far under as possible. He then lay down beside Noel to look into the cavity as the stone was lifted another foot.

'Are the props all fast?' he then asked of his foreman.

The man replied that they could not possibly give way.

Upon this the master again crept under the suspended mass, and on approaching the last quarter which lay near the base, Noel, who was watching every movement with a tremor of anxiety, saw him reach out one arm as if to feel the space before him. In another moment he seemed to have got hold of something, and to be pulling at it.

'A man's foot, surely,' said Noel to himself. 'Yet not necessarily *his*.'

Keeping hold of whatever he had found, the man forced himself back a little way towards the entrance of the space, and said to his men,—

'Catch hold of my legs, four of you; and when I tell you, pull me straight out.'

The stone was so broad that there was room enough for the levers along the sides and at the end, and for any one to pass between to get under. The four men, stooping and reaching far under the slanting stone, had got firm hold of their master's ancles, and were awaiting his signal.

Presently, having apparently arranged himself to his liking, he called out to them,—

'Haul away!'

With an effort and a rush the men emerged from beneath the ponderous roof, drawing their master by the legs until he was clear of it, and also drawing out another man whose legs he was grasping.

Heedless of the exclamations of astonishment and horror, Noel threw himself down by the body and cleared the face and head of the dirt with which it was covered. There was no mistaking its identity. The long, dark hair, and the pale, calm face, were indeed those of him whom he sought; and, owing to the softness and inequality of the ground, less terribly crushed than might have been expected.

Regardless of all around, Noel cried—

'Oh, my darling, my darling, how can you bear this!' and broke into a flood of irrepressible tears.

'Is this what he came here to look for?' asked the master of Noel's groom and coachman, who stood by in the wondering group. 'Did he know of it?'

They said that the gentleman who owned the body had left the hotel late last evening, and been out ever since; and the other gentleman had stayed behind in Salisbury to wait for him,

while the ladies belonging to them went on by the railway.

They all stood round, respecting Noel's grief, and removing as far as might be the muddy stains from the dead man's clothes. It was fast getting dark, and there was no moon. Noel bid the men finish their work in the morning. He should not be leaving Salisbury for some days, now. It was starlight as he drove with his sad burden, covered with a travelling rug, over the brown, quiet plain, past the sleeping flocks, past the deserted smithy, into the town; and as he passed the cathedral, —another reminiscence of his dead friend,—the people were streaming out from its portals: for it was the evening of 'Ascension Day.'

END OF PART III.

PART THE FOURTH.

CHAPTER I.

A POWER and a terror in the world has the word Sacrilege ever been. They who can use it with effect have already won their cause. To be effective, it requires only faith on the part, not of those who use it, but of those against whom it is used. There are indications that the particular direction of the religious instinct which has hitherto given to the term all its force, is undergoing a modification. There are many minds now for which the term no longer possesses a meaning or implies any distinct idea. The charge of 'Sacrilege,' once worst of crimes, is falling into disuse and oblivion as an engine of terror.

In the belief that man is competent to make gifts to the Deity, but unable to recall them without incurring the utmost degree of the Divine wrath, consisted the energy of the terrible phrase. In the rise and growth of the idea that all things whatsoever are necessarily and inalienably the Divine property, inasmuch as God is, by His very definition, the universal Creator, Sustainer, and Possessor; and that, as man can neither add to nor detract from the sum of His wealth, what is meant by man's giving to God is that he gives to what he deems his own best service;—herein consists the canker that is threatening the very idea of Sacrilege with decay.

If it be an onward step for humanity when, ceasing to draw a broad distinction between the Universe of Being and its creating and sustaining Principle, man comes to identify God with his own best, it must also be an advance when he deems

that which is most for the service of God to be also that which is most for his own good.

Unfortunately, much difference of opinion exists in the world as to what is most for the service of God, and, consequently, of man. In few countries, probably, has this difference of opinion led to such calamitous results as, of late years, in Mexico. The Church property there had been enormous. The value of that which still remained in 1863, after years of anarchy and revolution, was estimated at nearly forty millions sterling. Of this fund the distribution was claimed, on one side by the priests, who demanded the reversion of the act of 1859, by which they had been deprived of it; and, on the other, by the Mexican population, as represented by President Juarez. The former were a small minority, of alien blood, and owing spiritual allegiance to a foreign potentate. The latter constituted the nation.

The rough-and-ready manner in which Juarez was accustomed to assert the national right to this property, has already been shown. It had probably never occurred to him that a Divine Sanction, a Sanction not of Earth, was claimed by 'the Church,' as the priests were wont to call themselves, for its possessions. Probably no member or representative of that body ever thought of using such an argument to him. It was one that might have weight with peasants who knew nothing of history, political or ecclesiastical, and who were accustomed to hear so much of man's duty to God, the saints, and the priests, as to have but very dim and confused notions of man's duty to man. But Juarez, though sprung from this class, was so far removed from it in his intellectual acquirements, that to him 'the Church' in Mexico was but an organisation of foreign adventurers for the accumulation of wealth by any means, fair or foul; and he charged upon it a continuation of the rapacity which had marked the first Spanish conquerors. In his eyes the wealthier and more powerful the Church became, the poorer and more degraded was his own race.

It was not to be expected that his view of the matter should be accepted by the clerical party in Mexico. Neither was it likely to prevail on this side of the Atlantic, inasmuch as it was from this side that what Juarez regarded as but an association for the subjugation and plunder of his country on pretence of religion, derived its origin and support. To the patriot-president his country alone was sacred. For him sacrilege would consist

in leaving an atom of its wealth in the hands of the Church, at least so long as it acknowledged a foreign sway.

It was unfortunate for Mexico and for its popular ruler that the first French Revolution had never completed itself. Paris, indeed, had been emancipated, but the provinces remained subject to 'the Church.' This Church was a branch of that which claimed exclusive supremacy in Mexico; and upon it the French Emperor in great measure relied for the maintenance of his authority throughout the greater portion of his dominions. He had, moreover, taken for his Empress one who was bound to the Church in Mexico by the double tie of religion and race. It was scarcely possible for one, placed like Napoleon III., to decline a chance of consolidating his own power by conciliating the Church at home, or of pleasing his beautiful Empress by espousing the cause of her religion and race in Mexico. Besides, did he not owe some amends to Roman Pontiff and Austrian Cæsar for the part he had recently played in Italy?

When it is said that the question which had for years afflicted Mexico with civil war was a religious one, it can only be meant that it turned upon the point whether or not Mexico was to continue bound soul and body, lands and goods, to the officials of the Romish Church. The populace, being grossly ignorant, was naturally also grossly superstitious. Not through any identity of religious sympathy with Juarez was he accepted as a champion. It was the race that he represented. Even the insurrections which had in former times taken place against Spain, were headed by priests, and had for their object the maintenance, not the abolition, of Catholicism. They were grounded on the belief that Spain was conspiring to betray the Church by delivering the country to England.

But while the Mexicans are bigoted Catholics, they are far from being orthodox ones; that is, putting the capital out of the question. It had been a vast satisfaction to Maynard to find himself, in the course of his antiquarian researches, brought upon traces of the ancient ritual of the Aztecs. Guided by a variety of considerations, by their religious, literary, and architectural remains, as well as by their own distinct traditions, he had been led to believe that the same race which had spread westward and southward from the Hindoo Kúsh, had also sent a detachment by way of North-eastern Asia to the American continent, which had gradually worked its way down into

Mexico, subduing or amalgamating with the aboriginal inhabitants and assimilating the local religions to their own.

Whether or not Juarez contemplated retreating so far upon the old tracks as to endeavour to restore the national faith of his own people together with their independence, it would be premature to conjecture; but he certainly did not hesitate to inflict as much damage upon the fabric imported from Europe as was consistent with the maintenance of his authority.

Thus the peculiar views of the President combined with the exigencies of the State to make the antagonism between him and the *clerigos* complete. The charge of 'robbing God' fell harmless upon a man who did not care to deprive it of its sting by devoting even a portion of the property reclaimed from the Church, to such 'giving to the poor' as might fairly be accounted a 'lending to the Lord.' Even if he had so devoted it, there is little reason to suppose that the rancour of those upon whom restitution was thus forced, would have been mitigated.

A traveller who, venturing to penetrate to the city of Mexico in the autumn of 1863, was in possession of the clue to the complicated intrigues which had led to the entry of the French into the capital in the summer just past, was not likely to be at a loss to comprehend the difficulties of the position in which all parties stood towards each other. Probably, of all who were concerned, the task of Juarez was the simplest. Driven from his capital, he had only to fight against the invaders whenever he found an opportunity; and when he had no opportunity of fighting, to wait and look for one. While Juarez was thus fighting and waiting, the French were both fighting and endeavouring to contrive an arrangement whereby they could honourably violate their engagement 'not to force any government on the Mexican people,' by making the election of the Archduke Maximilian appear to be a voluntary act.

Under the French General, Forey, the clerical party, headed by the Archbishop of Mexico and backed by a few of the 'notables,' had formally invited the Austrian Prince to assume the crown; a proceeding that would be nearly paralleled were the bishops of the late Irish Church establishment and a few ultra-Protestant representative peers, representing a few other and non-representative peers, to take upon themselves to invite a foreign sovereign to become king of Ireland. Maximilian himself saw the absurdity of the proceed-

ing, and his hesitation led to France 'accepting the proposal as but a first indication of the wishes of the country,' and entering upon a new campaign for the purpose of collecting the suffrages of the provinces. This meant fighting, and forcing upon the whole of Mexico the authority hitherto established by the French only in the capital and over the route to Vera Cruz.

This was the juncture in October, when Forey was superseded by General Bazaine. Such was the energy and rapidity of the new commander's movements that the forces formed for the defence of the republic under the Juarist generals were overthrown in all directions; and in six weeks the desired assent to the Archduke's election, obtained from the principal towns.

It was during this campaign that Edmund Noel arrived in the city of Mexico. The errand on which he was bent was of a nature that compelled him to pay close heed to the political situation and prospects. He had come to Mexico in that troubled time to endeavour to dispose of the property, now owned solely by Margaret and himself, at Dolóres. It was little that he cared for himself in the matter; but it was her all. James Maynard had, to everybody's surprise, left a Will, and by that Will he left to Margaret 'whatever he might be found to possess, should he at any time chance to die.'

It was evident to Noel that the prospect of selling mining property in Mexico advantageously for a long time to come, depended entirely on the issue of the then pending campaign. If the French were successful, peace and prosperity would for the time be in the ascendant. If they failed, there was little hope of tranquillity under the republic. In the latter event his last hope of a liberal purchaser lay in Juarez himself, to whose friendship for 'Don Maynardo' he determined to appeal. A slice of the Church's property, it occurred to Noel, would be very nice and very appropriate for such a saint as Margaret.

Edmund reached Mexico to find the commander-in-chief absent on his momentous expedition, and the city torn by the dissensions of the Council of the Regency that had been appointed to govern in the interval before Maximilian's arrival. The three members might have got on pretty well had they all been laymen; for its president, the refugee Almonte, was equal to governing a dominion which consisted of a single city, of which the inhabitants were mostly of his own way of thinking;

and the old General, Solas, made a point of agreeing with him. But the remaining member was a no less important and holy personage than the Archbishop of Mexico himself; and his intractability and intrigues in the interest of his order were so glaring and mischievous that, rather than abolish the Council altogether, his colleagues determined to abolish him. It was accordingly signified to Monsẽnor Bastida, by the abrupt removal of his guard of honour from the archiepiscopal palace, that he was no longer recognised as a member of the Council of the Regency. Matters went on more quietly after this; and the intelligence that soon followed of the complete success of the campaign, gave Noel reason to believe that the expected revival of tranquillity and trade, might enable him to dispose of the mine without accepting a particle of Church property at the hands of Juarez. A merely temporary success for the French would, he considered, answer his purpose; but his sympathies continued to be with the republic.

CHAPTER II.

It did not augur well for the accord between the French and their clerical allies, that General Bazaine, on suddenly returning to the capital, found that, during his absence, the French army had been excommunicated by the Archbishop. It was a charmingly appropriate piece of revenge, but the General was more than a match for the powers of heaven as wielded by the prelate. Under his persuasions the discomfited dignitary bestowed his benediction publicly upon the excommunicated but victorious army; and the act proved to be the commencement of a period of tranquillity unexampled in Mexico in the previous forty years.

This period lasted for about four months. Towards the end of that time Maximilian arrived. Noel had taken advantage of the rising hopes for the future of the country, to dispose of the mine for a sum which, allowing for the circumstances, fully equalled his expectations. He was compelled, by the arrangements necessary for completing the sale and transfer, to remain until the Emperor's arrival at Vera Cruz. It was a tedious and an anxious time to him, relieved only by

his devotion to his book. The purchaser wished his presence at Dolóres, in order that they might go over the property together. The proposal startled him. He had not thought of such a thing. After a little reflection, he refused positively for himself, and nominated a substitute. He felt that he could not bear the pain of visiting the place again, deserted of all that made it sacred to him.

He had but one wish to gratify before quitting Mexico for ever. It was to see Juarez. This seemed impossible. His army and his generals were scattered to the far extremities of Mexico, and his own whereabouts utterly unknown.

It was the end of May when the new sovereign and his empress landed on the soil of Mexico. Noel was on his way to Vera Cruz, as the imperial cortège proceeded towards the capital. Thus, without any calculation on the subject, Noel witnessed the inauguration of the new destinies of Mexico.

Standing in the noble plaza of Puebla, amid a crowd which seemed, in its enthusiasm, to have forgotten the recent miseries of that twice besieged city, Noel examined with interest the countenance of the new monarch, and scrutinized the genuineness of the enthusiasm he excited.

'He means well, but is weak,' was Noel's conclusion, expressed audibly, but in English.

To his surprise, he was answered by an old man, bent with age, and wearing a long beard and hair of snowy whiteness, whom he had noticed standing beside him, silent, but intent on the scene, and had taken for a superior sort of peasant, and one little likely to understand a foreign tongue. The old man, fixing a keen glittering eye on Noel, whispered, in Spanish,—

'You have taken his measure *a púnto*. He is one to be led by others. That won't do in Mexico. *Póbre jovenéte*. He had better turn round and go home again!'

Noel recognised the glance and the voice. Knowing the imminent danger in which his companion stood, should be be recognised by any one else, he repressed his astonishment at seeing him there, and said, quietly and respectfully,—

'I was only regretting having to quit Mexico without seeing you. I have somewhat of interest to tell you. Dare you venture into my apartment?'

'Hotel?' inquired Juarez.

'Yes. Yonder.'

'I must not show myself in an hotel, even in this disguise.

Walk with me to the outskirts of the town, when the procession has passed.'

'How could you be so rash as to venture among all these French bayonets?' asked Noel, in a tone of friendly remonstrance, when they were clear of the crowd.

'There is often safety in rashness,' was the reply. 'They believe me far away on the Rio Grande. But I was bound to see my successor. No Indian would betray me, and few Spaniards out of the capital know me.'

'You still have hopes? Yet the crowd seemed to be enthusiastic.'

'I never despair. Least of all now that I have seen him. He is no ruler or leader of men. But tell me of Don Maynardo. I hope he is well.'

Noel related the fate of his friend, and the manner of it, and the cause of his own presence in Mexico. Juarez was much moved at the recital, for his regard for Maynard had been sincere. The circumstances struck him much, for Maynard had given him the key to his antiquarian notions.

When Noel had finished, he said, thoughtfully,—

'The fates sometimes have a grim humour in them,' and presently added,—

'I doubt not that my present defeat has enriched his family. I will not grudge it. It is but temporary.'

'I was disappointed to see the crowd so pleased,' said Noel.

'Hear the explanation,' returned the other. 'The *clerigos* hope, by conciliating Maximilian, to get back the property of which I deprived them. They have induced my people to shout for him, by telling them that he will give them the lands. That is, they pretend to credit him with my scheme! He rules by the land-owners, and therefore cannot do so if he would. I bide the time when the Indians discover the deception.'

'But France?' interrupted Noel.

'The United States are nearer and stronger than France. Their entire sympathy is with me and the republic. Their war will not last for ever.'

'Their war,' said Noel, 'seems to me to argue an intolerance of all republics save their own. It means that they will not endure another alongside of it.'

'In one sense, perhaps,' returned Juarez. 'But in another, it means Nationality,—that for which I contend. I

speak with certainty. They promise me support in the future. They give me an asylum in the present.

'Ah!'

'Yes. Think you not that I can afford to wait?'

'I fear the Afterwards for your nationality,' returned Noel. 'We Anglo-Saxons are a bad race into whose hands to fall. The Spanish conquered, and ruled; though in its own evil way. The Anglo-Saxon annihilates, and replaces by itself.'

'Not in Mexican latitudes. Like the Hindoo, the Indian is indigenous and eternal. The Spaniard is vanishing from the new world, as you call it. The Anglo-Saxon is transitory also. Wait till the supplies of old blood cease to come across the ocean!'

'I wish,' said Noel, after a pause, 'that you would let the world know more of you. Why not issue a manifesto of your principles? Forgive me for saying it, but you are very little comprehended in Europe.'

'Can one race ever comprehend another? does it wish to? No, I deal not in words. Posterity may do that when it interprets me by my actions. For myself, I am content that Juarez approves what Juarez does. Remember only that I do not work alone. I am a civilian, and the present belongs to soldiers. I must now bid you farewell. I need not ask you to be silent.'

And, without pausing for a reply or an *adios*, he turned into a thicket, for they were now at some distance beyond the walls of the town, and disappeared from Noel's view.

CHAPTER III.

THE loftiest and most precipitous of Alpine peaks remained unscaled by man. Its very inaccessibility excited in mountaineers an ardent longing to surmount it. At length, after many a vain attempt to reach even its base, one more skilful or more bold than the rest discovered a ridge that seemed to lead to its very summit. In the elation of his expected triumph, he trod with confidence the knife-like edge of his perilous path, until it led him so near to the flank of the

hitherto unapproachable giant, that, in the foreshortening effect of the clear mountain air, it seemed to him that victory was already in his grasp.

Then came his disappointment. A few steps farther, and before him yawned a chasm so deep, and broad, and steep, that nought without wings could hope to cross it. The adventurer might gaze in longing and despair upon the crown that, gleaming high above him, mocked his aspirations and his endeavours, but he had nought to do but turn round, and in weariness and dejection retrace his steps.

Such a chasm as that which robbed the scientific assailant of the Alps of his imagined triumph over the Matterhorn, did the death of James Maynard make between Edmund Noel and Margaret. Her own heart shrank back into inaccessible solitude; and he acknowledged to himself that neither faith nor daring could bridge the gap. His very approach increased the distance between them. His steps must be retraced; and, if ever he was to fulfil the longing of his life, he must start afresh from a new position, doubtful even then of the possibility of succeeding.

Long after the first bewildering agony of the shock of James's death, Margaret had remained as if paralysed with grief. Noel alone understood her well enough to know that her keenest pangs were those of self-reproach. Sophia Bevan wrote to him, weeks afterwards,—

'I never saw or heard of such unrelenting sorrow. She can do nothing but walk wildly through the grounds, refusing all companionship. Once I ventured to say how fortunate it was that you had guessed his haunt, otherwise he might have been there still, and we all in dreadful suspense. She answered, "Oh, that I had followed him, and been buried under the stone with him!"

'I don't understand it, and whatever I don't understand is apt to make me angry. It is not as if they had been so very, very happy together. I doubt if he would have taken on so for her, though he was much the most in love of the two. But then we women always care more for you men than you deserve.'

Noel determined to see her himself, but in such a way as to indicate nothing of his old feeling.

It was necessary for her to empower some one to act as her agent in the disposal of her share of the mine. Instruct-

ing a solicitor to make an appointment with her by letter for a certain date, but without naming him, Noel went himself, taking the necessary documents.

Entering the room unannounced, he found her sitting, gazing at the fire-place, lost in reverie, the picture of wan despair. Controlling himself as well as he could, he placed the papers on a table beside her, and said softly,—

'This is where you are to sign.'

She started at his voice, and gazed up at his face with an earnest, troubled look. He said, gently,—

'I have taken care that all is right. You will trust me.'

Taking the pen, she signed her name at the places indicated, but uttered no word. He gathered the papers together, and was moving slowly toward the door, when she succeeded in overcoming her paralysis, and said,—

'Do not think me ungrateful. I cannot talk yet.'

This was the only time Noel saw Margaret before he went to Mexico, although there was an interval of four months between his departure and the death of Maynard. During the winter that he was there he heard from Sophia.

'I determined to do something to rouse Margaret, if possible, even though I had to break through your injunctions, and recall Mexico to her recollection. Your last letter helped me. It came in while mamma and all were together. I looked at the post-mark, and cried, "Mexico! from Edmund Noel." Margaret looked at me bewildered. I took no notice, but opened it, and began to read it to myself. "He is quite well," I said to mamma, "and sends us all his best love; but he has no idea when he can come home."

'"Do you say that he, that Edmund Noel, has returned to Mexico?" asked Margaret, in a slow, wondering tone.

'"Yes, to be sure," I broke out. "Who else did you suppose was to arrange about your property?"

'"Edmund thought it best, my dear," said mamma, "for him to go himself and settle matters. He would not allow us to say anything to you about it, as he thought you might be distressed."

'She looked at one, and then at the other, and tried to speak, but her eyes filled with tears, and her voice was choked, and she got up and hastily left the room. They are the first tears she has been known to shed. We have hopes of her now.'

Noel had not heard again, for he had told Sophia that he

might be home before an answer could reach him. He arrived in London in July, and on going to his bankers, who were also Margaret's, learnt that she had gone to Italy in the early spring, but that Lady Bevan and Sophia were in London. Depositing the proceeds of the Mexican property, and telling the banker that he would shortly communicate with him respecting their investment, he hastened to the Bevans.

Sophia was out, but Lady Bevan received him with motherly affection. Quietly, but with deep feeling and appreciation, she gave him Margaret's recent history.

'The sweet child,' she said, 'is of the rarest order of natures. I believe she was breaking her heart, not so much for the loss of her husband, as for having, as she deems, failed in her duty by not being able to reciprocate his passionate idolatry for her. James was a man whose mind knew no repose. Before he loved, his whole energy went in pursuit of science. When he loved, he devoted it to his love, to Margaret's cost and his own. Life was such a torment to him that death was a blessing. He would not let her love him as she could, because she was unable to love him as he required. He repulsed her with bitterness, because the temperature of her affection was below that of his. And she, poor darling, blames herself, as if it had been possible for her to alter her nature, or his.

'She imagines it to be her duty now to provide for her children by her own exertions. She had nothing, you know, of her own, save a small settlement that I made on her when I first took her to live with me, and increased on her marriage; and James had only his Mexican interests. Margaret has no thought or expectation of getting anything on account of the latter, in the sad state of things in that country; and has actually gone to Rome to perfect herself in painting. She hopes that, should the worst come to the worst, she may be able, by copying pictures, to maintain her children in comfort. Sophia was very angry with her, and said it showed she did not believe in our affection. I confess that I was a little disposed to feel hurt at first, until I talked with old dame Partridge, who understands her better than any of us, about it. The dame was delighted. "Don't withstand it, ma'am, pray. I know Miss Margaret. Get her back at her old work among her pictures, and she will soon be herself again." And the dame begged to be allowed to accompany her. Margaret was much pleased at this, and said she was going to beg her of me.

And so, in March, they all set off for Rome, and intend to take the children to some cool place for the summer. And now tell me, dear Edmund, how you have fared.'

Lady Bevan was rejoiced to learn the unexpected success of his enterprise, and much interested in his account of the extraordinary conjunction of circumstances that made it possible. He told her that he proposed to invest the amount by distributing it among a number of various government securities, colonial and foreign, so that one might be a safeguard against the other, and a far higher average rate of interest be obtained with less risk than by any other way.

'She will be quite rich,' said Lady Bevan. 'I wonder how the intelligence will affect her.'

'I have a great favour to ask of you,' said Edmund. 'Do not allude to the subject at all, to her; but leave that with me. I am going to write, and inform her generally of what I have done; but shall not go into any particulars, beyond saying that she may draw upon her bankers as freely as she can have any occasion to do.. You and I can understand that deep wounds heal slowly, and that some natures are capable of deeper wounds than others. It would probably trouble her just now to have the fact of her unexpected affluence thrust upon her in such a way as to compel her to take notice of it. When she is well enough to wish to know all about it, she will inquire of her own accord.'

'I see. You have the patience that poor James lacked.'

Anxious to avoid any personal reference in such a connection, Noel said that he must now take his departure, but would soon call again to see Sophia.

'One moment,' said Lady Bevan. 'I have been looking through my poor cousin Littmass's latest writings, those upon which he was engaged at the time of his death, and I have thought they would interest you. Now that his son no longer lives to be pained by them, there is no reason for keeping them hidden. If, as seems to me likely, he had both James and Margaret in his mind when he wrote them, he may have had deeper reasons than we suspected for objecting to their marriage. The perusal of them has enabled me to understand her better than I could otherwise have done.'

Noel took the packet of papers which Lady Bevan gave him, and departed. Of his own conviction that at the bottom of Margaret's conduct lay an instinctive longing to do penance

for fancied defects of duty towards James, he said nothing.

There was another matter, too, on which he was equally reserved. No one but himself should know that he was about to invest by far the largest portion of the purchase-money he had brought from Mexico, in Margaret's name.

CHAPTER IV.

In answer to the letter wherein he briefly informed Margaret of the favourable result of his mission, and assured her that he was, as ever, at her disposal for any service he could render her, Noel received the following reply :—

'You know me too well, dear friend, to think me ungrateful, however much I may appear to be so. Had I been aware of all, I should have done my best to prevent your going again to Mexico. I do not know what my aunt and cousin must have thought of me. It seemed to me that all physical sensation was deadened by the mental. Even now, the ceaseless ache has not left me. I live only for my darlings. Thank God, they thrive in unconsciousness. To all else I am dead. Grateful for all your unselfish devotion, I wish only to hear that you have opened your heart to the future. Cherish me as a memory, if you will, but let it be a memory as of the dead. For you there may be much sunshine yet, if you will let it be so. For me, it will be my greatest happiness to know that my shadow no longer rests as a dark cloud upon you. When you have won the happiness which you deserve, and I wish you, it will be my greatest pleasure to see you and *her*. That, I think, would fill the principal want of my life. I should feel, then, that I had a brother and sister indeed.'

The summer passed wearily with Noel. He saw little of Sophia Bevan, for she was always in society, and society, in his existing mood, was distasteful to him. Until the heat and dust of August made him pine for the green country, he remained in town, occupied principally in trying to shape his book to his liking, and utterly failing therein. His mind was neither in the creative nor in the appreciative stage. He made the round of

the theatres, looking for the attempts of others to render life and truth into visible form, but was only disgusted by the unreality or vulgarity he found. Then he betook himself to his Devonshire home. There he existed awhile in undisturbed listlessness, for the Bevans had gone to divide the autumn between Ryde and Brighton.

Sophia was far from acquiescing quietly in these successive defections of the only two persons in the world for whom she really cared. But for once she owned her penetration at fault, and abstained from unsheathing the ready weapon of her indignation. She even allowed herself to be in some measure guided by Lady Bevan, who, though far from supposing herself to be the possessor of all wisdom and knowledge in matters affecting her friends, successfully represented to her that there are some complications which time only can unravel, and wounds which time only can heal; and so persuaded her to be content with letting her friends know that she was at their service whenever they might require her aid.

Noel did not again write to Margaret after receiving the letter last given. But early in December, when he became conscious that the summer was over, the harvest past, the skies black with hurrying storms, the trees around his dwelling swept of their leaves, and he himself neither saved nor saving by the power of the one love of his life; when, too, he heard that his presence was wanted to meet the gay party about to gather at Linnwood, a longing beyond control came over him, and he suddenly quitted his home, quitted England, and crossed the continent with all speed.

His one thought was,—

'Margaret, Margaret, I must see you, even though we meet not, nor speak.'

CHAPTER V.

Arrived in Rome, Noel's difficulty lay in contriving how to see Margaret without betraying himself to her. It was only to gratify his own longing that he came; and not by any means

for the purpose of seeking to overcome her resolution. The chasm between him and his Matterhorn he felt was not to be bridged over by any ordinary expedient. Once, in the early days of their acquaintance, and before the full strength, or weakness, of her character had become revealed to him, (it was just after his rescue of James from the Mexican bandits,) he had for an instant thought of what might come to pass were no one between them.

Now, as he approached nearer and nearer to her retreat, and no visible barrier interposed, he felt that she was in reality separated from him farther than ever. For him Margaret filled the air of the Eternal City, and every breeze that blew wafted to him fresh revelations of her character. Avoiding the Pincian Gardens, for he wished not to be recognised by her children or the dame, who, he knew, would often be there with her; avoiding also the galleries, whither she was unlikely to go unattended, he watched among ruins and churches, where he might possibly behold her unperceived. Laden as she was with the burden of a real woe, she was not one, he well knew, to seek distraction in tending lamps at the shrine of Madonna or Magdalen, like the fair Hilda of the Romance they had so much enjoyed reading together at Capri, when Noel told Margaret that Hawthorne must have had her and her earlier life in Rome in his mind. No, Noel's idea of Margaret now was of one seeking for peace, and finding it only in the distractions of toil. He saw her two or three times, as she passed between her dwelling and the studio of her master, or as she went out to walk with her little girls; but her face was always veiled, her voice inaudible, and her demeanour intensely subdued. Noel determined to see her countenance, if possible, before revealing himself to her.

At length he succeeded. Following her one day to St Peter's, he concealed himself behind a column, while she knelt, not very far off, resting her hands on the marble railing which surrounds the tomb of St Peter. It was at a time when no one else was near. Her veil was entirely off her face. Leaning back as she knelt, and looking upwards as if under the influence of an ecstasy, a gleam of light descended from the dome above her, and appeared to Noel to crown her as with a diadem of glory as it glowed amid her hair, while the expression of her pale heroic face was that of a saint, at once suffering, resigned, and triumphant.

At that instant was clearly revealed to him what had been

dimly hovering in his mind. Margaret sought peace through suffering. Had she really attained it? or was it the gleam of light from above which imparted to her aspect the glow of a triumph that was not really hers?

It was thus that he read her:—

'She would only consent to sin on condition that she might suffer. She would take a course involving ruin and disgrace to herself, rather than receive honour for doing what she deemed unlawful. She would scorn to receive the world's respect, while possessed by the conviction that she was undeserving of it. Self is nought. Right is all. Ah, Margaret; it will take a stronger than human love, a stronger than human duty, to win you from the inexorable Absolute that claims your soul.'

While Noel pondered thus, Margaret's thoughts appeared to wander. She looked around as if disturbed by a vague apprehension. She saw no one, yet she pulled down her veil. Presently she rose, and prepared to leave the church. But instead of going straight to the main door, she approached the spot where Noel was standing. He determined to remain still and await her. His impression was, that she would pass by him without perceiving him. He was mistaken. Coming up close, she drew a deep breath, and said,—

'It is you, then. You have been some time in Rome. I felt it. Can I serve you?'

Clearly she did not quite know whether she was talking to him in the flesh or in the spirit.

'I have not come to trouble you,' he said; 'but merely to gratify the intense longing I had to see you. But, Margaret, why will you think that you are alone in the world, with no one to care for, to love you?'

Passing her hand over her brow, she said,—

'Can I have been thinking too much of myself? I hoped that you had forgotten me, and were learning to be happy in a new direction. What have you been doing with yourself? You look older and careworn.'

'I have been doing nothing but—but waiting for you. Oh, Margaret,' he added, passionately, 'how can you ignore reality in this way? It is not virtue, not religion, but merest superstition, to reject the great truths of love, no matter at what promptings. If you and I were sent into the world for any special purpose, it was to love each other. And now you insist on thwarting the divine decree that ordered our natures, regard-

less of my misery, and your own,—yes, your own,' he repeated emphatically, as she gently shook her head in dissent; 'for nothing shall persuade me that the Margaret I have ever loved so truly, can be happy while she knows that I am wasting life in pining for her.'

'Believe me, Edmund,' she replied, 'that I act as appears to me to be right. You know well that it is no mere selfish impulse which I am obeying. Tell me what it is that you want of me.' And she leant against the column as if to support herself to bear his answer.

'I want you to be my all in all in the future, as you have been in the past. I want you to be my love, my life, and my wife. I want you to be all to me that a woman can be to a man, now and for evermore.'

Gathering herself together as by a mighty effort of will, she stood erect and unsupported before him, and said, slowly and firmly,—

'Edmund, I love and respect you far too well to grant your request. I cannot enter a world which, if it knew what my heart has been, would scoff at me as one who loved another better than him to whom she was married. I cannot dwell by your side a loved, honoured, and happy wife, while conscious that there is a history you dare not disclose. No, no, the jewel that you wear before all men, must be one undimmed by such a cloud as rests upon me.'

He was about to speak, but she prevented him, saying,—

'I know all you would say, and all you think, but I cannot do as you wish. In one other way than that which I have chosen, and only one, I can meet you. It depends upon yourself to accept or reject it.'

His eyes fastened eagerly on her, as he waited to know in what the new gleam of hope for him consisted. She went on,—

'I cannot be your wife, but I will be all else to you. Take me, use me as you wish. So shall I find such happiness as I may have in your happiness, without the regret of being a lasting drag on your life. I shall not reproach you for having your eyes opened, and leaving me, for the worthier fate that certainly awaits you in the future. Speak,' she added, in a soft tone of entreaty, as if she had brought herself really to desire what she offered. 'Say that you will take me so, and I will try to give you no cause to repent.'

Noel gazed upon her for a few moments in silent wonder.

Should he kneel at her feet and adore her as a deity sanctifying that dome, by condescending, beneath its roof, to a loftier sacrifice of self than was ever made before; loftier in that it involved submission to sin, as well as to pain, and the misery of remorse? or should he be angry with her?

Whatever his real feeling, his words indicated the latter,—

'Margaret, are you aware that you are offering to be my mistress?'

'I know nothing of names,' she said. 'I only know that if you will come to me when you wish, and leave me when you wish, let it be often or seldom, as you please, I will endeavour to make you as happy as I can, and be thankful as for a duty performed. Will you take me so?'

'And since when have you believed that no one but yourself can love? In what have I shown myself deficient, that you think me capable of accepting such a sacrifice from you?'

'Do you think I should feel it one?' she asked. 'I thought you knew me better. Rather would it be a sacrifice for me to court the humiliation of a second failure. Who knows but that in that closer relation which you require of me, I should fail again as I have failed once; and this time with you for the victim, bound for ever when too late the knowledge comes.—No, no, the sacrifice for me would be to follow the world. It is no sacrifice thus to indulge my pride; and I am too proud to hold you by a tie in which the soul's content has no necessary part.'

It was clear to Noel that Margaret's present mood was exalted alike above the reach of logic and of love. Her whole expression was one of abstraction. It was not to him in reality that her utterances were addressed, but to him in her imagination, as to one dimly seen in a vision. He was about to remind her that marriage is a matter of personal relation; that failure with one person does not in the least indicate a likelihood of failure with another; and that their whole past relations gave the lie to such a supposition in their own case. But she arrested him ere he began, and said,—

'I will not take your answer now. Let me go. Do not follow me. Take time, and write to me. Two words, "I accept," will be enough. I await them.'

And, casting a hurried but intense look of affection upon him, she hastened away and quitted the church.

If Margaret expected an answer, she expected it in vain.

That night Noel left Rome and returned to London, having made no sign.

CHAPTER VI.

THE following letter from Sophia awaited Noel in London:—

'What has become of you, and what is the matter with you? And what do you mean by spoiling my Christmas party by your absence from it? I heard that you were in Devonshire, and I got two or three leading men to come to meet you, thinking they would be useful in helping you to get into Parliament, where I want you to be, that you may the better help me with my Project, which does not stand still, though its progress is much slower than I like. Are you ill? or in love? or merely good for nothing, and going to the dogs? Let me have a line to say, that I may know whether my sympathies are wasted on you.'

In reply to this, Noel hastily despatched the following note:—

'DEAR, GOOD SOPHY,

'I am ill. I am good for nothing. I am in love. I am going to the dogs. I can't afford to go into Parliament; and I have no notion of championing women to further independence. To my mind, they have too much of it already. Some of them, at least.'

And then he set to work once more to remodel and rewrite his book, fancying that he saw in it a last chance of winning Margaret, at least from the intensity of her woe. His plan now was to set before her a picture of life that should be, in a general sense, intelligible to all, but in a particular sense only to her. Her character and her relations to James and to himself should be so represented as to exhibit her absolute faultlessness, at least in the eyes of himself and of those who aspire to a higher law for the conduct of humanity than is ordinarily recognised. By thus convincing her of perfect righteousness in thought and

act, he hoped to win her from the conviction of sin, and the idea of penance, which had taken such fast hold of her.

'I see how it is,' was his reflection. 'Margaret hopes to atone for what she fancies to have been a defect of duty towards James by an excess of devotion towards me; but that devotion must be accomplished in a way that will bring suffering in place of happiness to herself. It is the curious old theological notion of compensation for error by pain. A school-boy has a more difficult lesson than he can manage, and the master beats the boy for failure, instead of blaming himself for setting it. People degrade the Almighty into a flogging pedagogue. It is less trouble to strike than to teach; to frighten than to win. Really, Margaret is very illogical in this idea of hers. She thinks that I cannot fail some day to reproach her, in my heart at least, on account of the past. She will not see that if any wrong has been committed, I must be a sharer in it. It must be that where love is concerned she is blind. I cannot deem this an imperfection in her. So for me Margaret remains as ever, perfect in all respects.'

As his work grew under his hands, it was a supreme delight to him to find how completely one spirit had animated himself and Margaret throughout. He by principle, and she by instinct, had come to own one and the same law as king over the conscience of both, even that perfect law in the heart, the default of which lands man in conventions. From the beginning of their relations until now, did Noel trace the consistent operation of the rule which constitutes human feeling the ultimate criterion of action. It was by no fault of Margaret that James had failed of perfect happiness. She had ever ignored herself, and done her best for him. If his lot was dashed with misery, it was through the meeting in it of elements which could not combine, and that by no fault of theirs. He lived in the quick. The tension of his life was too great. Yet he would not have exchanged it for the calm flow of a more perfect contentment. He had been as happy, therefore, as he was capable of being; and this through Margaret. Ought she not then to be satisfied, even though his happiness was not of the kind that she could herself appreciate?

No thought of the world had ever come between James and Margaret; and now that he was removed, the world was equally far from her. It provided her with no scruple or restriction. As before, she had thought only what would be

best for James, so now, she thought only what would be best for Edmund.

On his part, Noel owned to himself that the sole controlling influence for him had been his intense solicitude for her future happiness, and for James's as influencing hers. Thus, he had declined the last sacrifice she had offered of herself, chiefly, if not solely, because he felt that his acceptance of it must create unhappiness for her some time in the future. Whatever the immediate interval of ecstasy, nothing could compensate him for the conviction that, constituted as society is, he should be laying up for her a possible futurity of mortification and woe. The more truly he loved her, the less could he take her and be happy at such cost to herself. However confident he might be that he should never abandon, never change to her, he could not hope for ever to shield her from the consciousness that must some day come—the consciousness that he had not insisted on the best for her.

It was a further pleasure to Noel to reassure himself of the genuineness and strength of his affection for Maynard; and it was a source of never-failing satisfaction to him to reflect that there had been no open conflict between them to engender bitterness; though at the same time he was Artist enough to perceive how much the story he had to tell would have gained in dramatic interest from such a clash.

As the sad details of his history receded from the region of sorrow into that of sentiment, and the outlines of his character and principles became blended into a distinct and coherent form, Noel learnt to generalise the man and his meaning. He thus came to attain a comprehension of Maynard's favourite doctrine of evolution, surpassing in vividness and grandeur all his previous conceptions of it. And,—regarding all life as an education, not merely for the individual or for the race, but for the whole universe of being,—'if,' he thought, 'in all departments of nature alike, in the physical, the intellectual, the moral, the emotional, there be inherent a capacity for advance towards results which become perpetually larger and more complex, what matters it how the atom transiently fares? If that capacity be accompanied by Consciousness, what is wanting to complete our idea of Deity?'

It had been Maynard's view that the conflict between the two great schools of thought,—always co-existent, but dominant at different eras,—commenced long before the terms, or the

ideas, of theology or science were invented: so long ago even as the days when first Deity was imagined by some men as a Being apart from and superior to Nature, a Being 'who spake, and it was done;' or by others, who viewed the world pantheistically, as One in whom 'we live and move and have our being.'

The difference he held to be rather one of method than of result: and, in so far as it arose from differences of individual temperament, altogether incapable of adjustment by any device or demonstration of logic. It seemed, however, to Noel, that the two lines of thought were combined, if not blended, in Maynard himself; like, perhaps, if an illustration may be ventured upon, the two parallel rails on which the locomotive runs. For, while believing in an universal system of law, and in the progress and development of man as part of that system, he maintained that it was impossible to dissociate from it those ideas of Consciousness and Will which for man indicate Deity. Maynard's view of the phenomena both of the Abstract and of the Concrete, led him to regard the dualism which he found inherent in the universe, as the prime and perpetual essential of existence. This dualism for him implied Love. It was love that he beheld operating in all stages of creation, from the lowest to the highest, producing the worlds, producing humanity, and by its continued and sublimating agency, raising man into a condition of appreciation of the Infinite.

In his view, therefore, it was a false philosophy which dissevered the love that is spiritual from its proper natural basis. To dissolve the connection between the two extremities of the same process was to mutilate the whole, and degrade and stultify both, inasmuch as it relegated one to contempt, and the other to the inanity of a vain imagining.

But Noel intended his book to be romantic, rather than didactic. He would not, therefore, imperil its artistic character by minute references to the great issues indicated by such trains of thought, except in so far as they affected and illustrated Maynard's character. Neither was it here that he would develop his friend's ideas concerning the old divisions of mankind, and show how he illustrated the Continuity of nature, by tracing modern dogmas back to their earliest discoverable source in Oriental imagery and speculation; or exhibit, interesting though the process might be, the probability that from the meeting of races primitive or antagonistic, sprung the com-

pound of identity and antagonism that has ever since constituted the religious thought of man.

Many a time, in the progress of his labour of love, was Noel tempted into the devious paths of such speculations as these, and many an idea and suggestion did he note down for future use. It even seemed to him that he occasionally made an advance upon the ideas he had gathered from Maynard in these matters; but it was rather with the development of Maynard's emotional character, under the double influence of his philosophy and his love, that Noel's present concern lay. In the pursuit of his task he perused the papers given to him by Lady Bevan, and was greatly struck by Lord Littmass's clairvoyant insight into the characters of Margaret and James, and his prevision of their incompatibility. And he thought more highly of the moral status of the artist who could appreciate and forecast such natures. It was, he held, no derogation of Lord Littmass's art that he failed, and died: no derogation of Maynard's philosophy that he did likewise. The problem they both sought to solve, was soluble only by death. Modern Convention, disregardful alike of Philosophy and Art, had ordained that it should be so.

By the time that Noel approached the last division of his work, he was confirmed in his idea of the supreme religiousness of Maynard's character. He saw how, in the most rigidly mechanical departments of science, he had ever recognised the invisible God struggling to become manifest through, and to, 'the things which are made;' and on their part, the things which are made striving to become conscious of their inherent unity. The growth of the human intelligence, the development of human thought, faith, feeling, and knowledge, were for him the result of nature's perpetual effort to know itself. For him, the religion could not be true which is opposed to or independent of science, for by science Maynard meant the knowledge of that which is, and by religion, the spirit in which that knowledge should be followed. Morality he regarded as being purely a question of human relations, to which all transcendental considerations were alien. The asceticism of temperament engendered by his early life and education had first become relaxed in presence of the revelation which he found in the rudimentary nature-worship of mankind, of love as the prime deity. It gave way altogether as the sentiment of love inspired by Mar-

garet orbed into a full and perfect passion; orbed, alas! to set in agony and death.

'But,' asked Noel of himself, 'had it really set, and for ever? Might it not have suffered an eclipse only, to emerge in splendour beyond?'

This was beyond the ken of Noel, or of any other. Happily it was no part of his present task to solve the problem of a love that never found its earthly sequel and satisfaction in a blissful reciprocity; or to decide how far its anguish was a necessary preliminary to his development in a future existence. How far a capacity for love thus originated, thus nurtured, thus abruptly rended, could resume its course in another life and under other conditions of being, was a question on which Maynard had seemed to have formed his ideas in accordance with his circumstances and temperament, rather than his reason or science. In the very futility, disappointment, and agony of this life he had sought the demonstration of another. For him, in theory at least, to mourn here implied the possibility of being blessed hereafter. But these were topics on which he had rarely spoken; and his utterances were too much the offspring of his mood to be a fair indication of his fixed belief. Noel now better than ever comprehended his poor friend's meaning, and the ineffable longing of his spirit, when, in the shade of their grove on their high place in Mexico, James had found an argument for immortality in the quaint utterance of his favourite poet:—

'Dear dead women, with such hair, too,—what's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly, and grown old.'

It was a solace to Noel to think that the anguish of his latest moments might have been assuaged by the shadow of a possible future, as indicated by this other and distincter prophecy of hope and longing, which also Maynard loved:—

'Delayed it may be for more lives yet.
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few,
Much is to learn, and much to forget,
Ere the time be come for taking you.'

And then Noel's own fancy went careering on in the same track:—'But how will it be with me? Even if I win her here, how will it be when the pursuit is renewed in the worlds beyond? Oh, Margaret, to whom will you cling then? Will

it not be to the nobler and stronger nature? Ah me, where then is rest or certainty? Is eternity, too, an education?

'Or can it be that, baffled in his upward quest by his failure to win the satisfaction of an earthly reciprocity, James was timely translated to a sphere where henceforth he is for ever free from all bondage of the heart?

'If such be man's lot in heaven, well is it for us that we know it not here.'

CHAPTER VII.

MEANWHILE Sophia Bevan had no notion of allowing her old friend to slip out of her life in this manner. Her friendship lasted as long as her regard. She knew and loved Edmund Noel well enough to take the liberty of interfering for his good.

As soon as she could get free from her guests, she set off for London, accompanied only by her maid, and telling Lady Bevan that she feared there was something wrong with Edmund, and that she could not rest until she had at least tried to set it right.

She found him looking haggard in face and shabby in mien, devoid of the careful elegance with which she knew he had been accustomed always to surround himself, and altogether unlike his former self. There was a hard glitter in his eyes, and a mixture of sarcasm and cynicism in his speech, which alarmed her. She had intended at first to tell him that she had come expressly to see what he was doing with himself, and to take him to task for his neglect of his friends. But on seeing him she changed her plan, and said that she had run up to town on business, and could not leave it without having a chat with him. Was it his uncle's affairs that were worrying him? she asked, with affectionate concern.

'I dare say they would, if I were to let them: but I have other things to think of,' was his reply.

'But I have understood that there is a large fortune awaiting you, by proper management.'

'May be. I don't trouble myself about it. I prefer literature to law, work to wealth.'

Unable to make anything of him, she said that really all her greatest friends seemed to be turning against her. There was Margaret choosing to live away in Italy, all alone with her children and nurse, and the old woman wrote that she never saw her mistress so happy.

'Is that recent news?' asked Edmund, with as much indifference as he could contrive.

'Only last week. I want her to come home.'

'Margaret is——Margaret. Better leave her where she is contented. She certainly seemed to be so last month when I saw her.'

'You saw her! What, have you been to Rome this winter?'

'I ran over just for a change, and had a peep at the happy family. When do you return to Devonshire? Lady Bevan is well, I trust. Mind you give her my best love. Dear old lady, I wish there were more like her.'

Sophia went away provoked and perplexed. Determined to save him if she could, in spite of himself, she went to his solicitor, to whom she was slightly known.

Abruptly telling him her errand, and saying that her interference was justified by a life's friendship and earnest concern for his client's welfare, she gained the lawyer's confidence sufficiently for him to admit that Noel's neglect of business was a serious obstacle to a favourable settlement of his uncle's affairs, and that it would be a friendly act in any one who would induce him to give his attention to them. There was a prospect of a very handsome residue after all demands were settled.

'He must be very well off now,' said Sophia. 'My cousin's share of the sale of the Mexican property has made her a rich woman, though I do not know the amount.'

'Do you happen to know whether they were owners of equal shares in the property?' asked the lawyer.

'Yes, I am sure of that. Why?'

'The portion which came to Mr Noel would scarcely justify the term rich. It made an addition to his previous income, certainly, but it was very far from what I had been led to anticipate.'

'Yet I understood that the sale had been a most satisfactory one. Stay. I think I comprehend it. I will go to Edmund and ask. No. Tell me the amount he got for his share, and I will write and ask my cousin hers.'

'I am not able to give you the information at this moment,' said the lawyer, who did not feel at liberty to disclose so much of his employer's affairs without permission.

'Well, it is no matter. I will ask Edmund himself.' And Sophia took her leave.

Presenting herself a second time to Noel, she said,—

'Please don't think I wish to annoy you, but I went away and forgot one of the things I most wanted to ask you. It has occurred to mamma and me that our dear Margaret has withdrawn herself from us through a fear of being a burden to us, and that she lives in Italy for the sake of economy. We can't bear the idea of her being pinched. You can tell me if she really has an income on which she can live comfortably.'

'You don't suppose that I should allow James Maynard's widow to want for anything?' said Noel.

'And therefore you have given her the whole, or nearly the whole, of the Mexican purchase-money?'

'Pray what put such a thing into your head?'

'Things come into my head without being put there,' she returned saucily; and then her eyes were suffused with tears, as she added,—

'But, Edmund, dear, you ought to know that we women don't learn things with our heads merely. We should be much oftener wrong than we are if we trusted to them. If I have never been mistaken in you, it is because I have always read you with my heart, until I think I know you by heart. It is my heart that tells me you have done this for Margaret. It is my heart that tells me you have been to Rome with a special object in seeing her. It is my heart that tells me that whatever that object may have been, you have come back disappointed. And it is my heart that tells me you are indulging in a morbid misanthropy, neglecting duties, and rejecting a fortune and career that are within your reach,—for such, I understand, is your position in regard to your uncle's property. Why, you don't suppose that I can see my old friend and playmate melting away out of my sight, as you are doing, and not seek to discover the meaning of it, or try to retain him? Tell me, have I done anything to forfeit your friendship? If I have been naughty, I will repent very humbly, and sue for forgiveness. But I cannot lose you without knowing why.'

'My dear Sophy,' he returned, 'I have nothing to reproach you with. I have just as much affection and regard for you as

ever. Pray think of any cause but that. Think it possible that I may be going through a phase of character which seems to you strange and distant: and that I may prefer going through it unobserved. But this is no dereliction of friendship. It is a very ordinary phenomenon.'

'Well,' she said, 'I am glad you have nothing against me. Not that I thought you had. Rather is my complaint against you, for letting yourself be ill, or moody, or whatever it is, and never letting me have a chance of helping you through it. Do you know what a woman's diagnosis and prescription for you would be?'

'I suppose that, as is usual with her sex, she would jump to a conclusion, in total ignorance or disregard of the symptoms.'

'Possibly; but, thinking with her heart, and feeling with her brain, as I try to do, she would say that a man who acts, or does not act, as you are doing, is either in love, or ought to be. That is, he *needs* a wife, whether he *wants* one or not.'

'The same prescription has been given me before,' said Noel, trying to laugh.

'By whom?'

'By Margaret.'

'May I ask, when?'

'Oh yes; in Capri. After my uncle's death.'

'Did she recommend any one?'

'Oh, dear, yes.'

'Any one I know?'

He hesitated. She went on,—

'Was it I?'

'Yes.'

'Dear, good Margaret. She knew I should at least take care of you, and not let you waste your life. Did she renew her recommendation when you saw her in Rome lately?'

'Well, really, I don't think the subject was mentioned. The atmosphere of Rome is not suggestive of matrimony. At any rate, her thoughts did not seem that way inclined.'

'Well, I forgive her. While James was living, there was one person who was too good for you. Now there is another who might do better. Has she refused you?'

'What *do* you mean?'

'I mean what I thought years ago, when I first knew Margaret; that she and you were made for each other. That

you controlled the feeling before is very creditable to you. But there is no necessity for doing so now.'

'Really, for the remarkably plain-spoken young lady you generally are, you are wonderfully enigmatical to-day.'

'Don't pretend. Margaret is a woman that no man can help being in love with. Least of all a man like you. I am in love with her myself. If I thought you were not in love with her, I should think the worse of you.'

'Is love, in your experience, so omnipotent as to compel love?'

'No, it is not, as you very well know,' she replied, her eyes filling with tears, perhaps at some reminiscence of her own life.

'My dear Sophy, I did not mean to pain you. I only asked if it followed necessarily that because I love her, she should love me.'

'You admit loving her, then?'

'Denial seems to be useless with such a very positive philosopher as you are. I don't mind your thinking what you please; but I should be very sorry for the same idea to be given to Margaret. With you, the imaginative faculty is so active that you can suppose and un-suppose, and no harm done. But she is different. It would dash the whole of our relations to each other, were she to think that my friendship had any ulterior reference. I should not like to seem selfish in her eyes.'

'You don't deny a bit of my indictment: and I am more sure than ever that I am right, because for about the first time in your life you are serious with me, and do not fly out at my interference.'

'I know, my dear Sophy, that you always mean most kindly by me. If I have ever seemed to resent the activity of your interest, it is only owing to the reserve that seems natural to me, but morbid to you. But I have often been obliged to you afterwards, for dragging me out of myself, though I may not have shown it.'

'I am so unaccustomed to gratitude from you,' she said, smiling through the tears that still glistened in her eyes, 'that a little of it goes a great way with me. But I must be going now. You will let me see you again before I return home, will you not? It will haunt me to think I have left you unhappy.'

'I have a great mind to reward you for your devotion by

giving you some verses of mine to look over. I think they will interest you, as illustrating some of your friend's phases of feeling. But you must not take them as having any close or literal application.'

'Oh do; I shall be so pleased if only I can guess at anything of you beneath the surface.'

And she took leave of him, carrying with her the verses which Margaret had found in the book he had left with her in the forest at Dolóres.

She had no sooner gone than Noel regretted what he had done. 'Her active imagination will be sure to connect Margaret with those lines,' he thought. 'But there is no great harm in that, if she does not suspect Margaret of being a party to them. Her true friendship deserves more acknowledgment than I can make in return.'

The next morning's post brought him this note, evidently hurriedly dashed off in excitement:—

'I do hope you will not claim your poem back just yet. It is quite safe with me, and I do so enjoy having it. I have read it over and over. It is very fervid and felt. Indeed, it seems as if all feeling must have been exhausted in those three experiences:—in the first, passion without affection; in the second, affection without passion; in the third, both combined. What can Life offer beyond that? Do not complain. You have *had* your cake.'

The evening's post brought him a second note, saying he would not see her again for some days, as she was going into the country.

CHAPTER VIII.

While Noel, refusing any further reply to Margaret's proposition, was hurrying homewards from Rome, she passed the first day or two in reflecting on her own motives and the possible result. Her one hesitation was suggested by the fear lest she had been influenced by any thought of happiness to herself.

'For me,' she said to herself, 'I could gladly endure long seasons of torment to know that he would come for intervals, however brief, and be happy at my side. But I do not think it is this that has prompted me. No, I am sure that my own love and own happiness have no part in my offer; were they so, I might have done wrongly. But being for him, for his sole good, there can be no wrong in it. The greater the cost to myself the better.'

When day after day passed, and no reply came, and no sign appeared of Noel's being still in Rome, the warm blood mantled in her cheeks as she divined the cause, and thought,—

'He has departed without giving it a serious thought. He knows the world better than I do. He loves me too well to take me at my word.'

Probably nothing could more forcibly exemplify the unworldliness of Margaret's character and experiences than the total omission from her thoughts of the effect that the acceptance of her proposition by Noel would have upon the position of her children or her own relations with her aunt and Sophia, or even upon Noel's own character and position in the world. In her absolute unconventionality her children were to her, not 'daughters,' but merely little girls. The idea of a stigma upon herself, or upon them, as a result of her acting up to what she deemed her best, never for an instant occurred to her. Had she failed to fulfil her own conception of duty by acting to please herself, it would have been different. Self-denial and atonement were as innate dogmas with her. Even when she referred to the world, it was not the actual world, but the world as she imagined it—that is, God,—that was in her thought.

She subsided into her usual calm course of life. One evening, about a week after Sophia Bevan's visit to Noel, as Margaret was sitting with her children at their evening meal, she was amazed by the sudden entrance of Sophia.

'I wouldn't let them announce me. Can you take me and my maid in for a night, or must we go to an hotel? Don't let us derange you. I have only just come over for a chat; and must hurry back, as I have left mamma alone and wondering what has possessed me.'

While Sophia ran on, Margaret conferred with the dame as to the possibility of making arrangements for their unexpected visitors. Meanwhile, Sophia exercised her delight upon the

little girls, with whom she was an especial favourite, until Margaret came and said,—

'Now, Sophy, we are ready to keep you as long as you will stay.'

'And I may sleep here? that is charming. I want a good talk with you, but must not linger abroad. You need not look serious. There is nothing to be alarmed about. How nicely the darlings grow. And you are looking so well too, quite a colour. James always said that Rome had a natural affinity for your race. It certainly agrees with you.'

After she got Margaret alone, Sophia subsided into seriousness.

'I have come partly to have a peep at you and the chicks, and partly to consult with you about our dear Edmund. It was on seeing him in London that I formed my sudden resolution. Ever since his return from Mexico he has shut himself up; seen nobody; worried his lawyer by neglect of most important business; risked, if not lost, his own fortune; and looks altogether careworn and slovenly, instead of bright and genial as we have always known him. I knew you would agree with me that we who are his friends must not let him sink uncared for into illness or poverty. So here I am.'

'Ill and poor! He was not too ill to come here last month; and I don't see how he can be poor when I am able to draw so freely on my bankers, and he has the other half of the property, in addition to his other fortune.'

'Are you so sure of that?' asked Sophia, who was watching for this opportunity.

'How can it be otherwise? Mr Tresham gave it in equal shares.'

'What was the amount of the purchase-money?'

'I really don't know.'

'But you know what your half came to?'

'Indeed, I do not. I suppose I ought to be ashamed of my neglect, but the fact is that where I have perfect confidence I never think of inquiring.'

'I see,' said Sophia. 'And he trusted to that for your not finding it out.'

'Finding out what?'

'And what brought him to Rome lately?' asked Sophia, suddenly shifting the ground, and looking Margaret full in the face.

Rarely had Margaret been conscious of an emotion that sent the blood mantling to her face. She fancied that of late years she had become more liable to the affection. Certainly the date of its origin was subsequent to her acquaintance with Noel. On the present occasion Sophia's abrupt question caused her to feel as if the whole crimson flood of her system were mounting to her head. Making a vast effort to control herself and repress the visible signs of her emotion she merely said,—

'Did he not tell you?'

'He said only that he wanted a change.'

'He did not tell me the precise purpose of his journey. But I saw very little of him; and he left rather suddenly, I believe.'

'Listen to me, please. I wanted him to come to Linnwood, and to get into parliament. He said he had no heart for gaiety, or anything, and was too poor to enter parliament. I learnt from his lawyer that his share of the Mexican property has made but a trifling addition to his means, though yours has made you rich; and that he systematically refuses to avail himself of the considerable fortune which he might recover from his uncle's property. I learn, partly from you and partly from himself, that he came suddenly to Rome, and left it as suddenly after seeing you; left it, too, in deep disappointment; and I gather from himself that he is very deeply in love. Now, putting all these things together, what do you tell me that I ought to infer from them?'

'I cannot say, indeed,' murmured Margaret; 'but if you have any reason to think that he has deprived himself of his share for me, I must write and ask. How careless and ungrateful he must think me! And so wrong of him, as if he could think that I would accept what is not properly mine.'

'Probably it was that conviction which made him do it in such a way. But I don't think you ought to be offended.'

'His affection for James must have prompted his generosity——'

'More likely his affection for James's widow. Come, Margaret, don't pretend insensibility. I asked you once to recommend a wife to Edmund, and like a good creature you recommended me.'

'How do you know?'

'Never mind. I asked him plump, and he was obliged to acknowledge it. It was a mistake, though a pardonable one, for

one who knows so little of the world as you do, to make. Ours has always been one of those friendships that are incompatible with love—at least such as Edmund imagines it. I could never be anything but as an elder sister to him. Well, I thought then that there was one in the world better suited to his taste than any other whom I knew, but that one was pre-engaged. She is free now. Will you take him?'

'Really, Sophy,' stammered poor Margaret; but Sophia having burst her bounds went on impetuously.

'Here's the best fellow in the world—I know all his faults—has been in love with you since the first moment he saw you, and that, I happen to know, was long before you ever saw him. His whole life has turned upon you ever since he knew you. He is consumed by a hopeless attachment for you—wasting his life, ruining his health, giving you one-half his fortune, and running the risk of losing the other. He talks of devotion to literature, but that must be a mere pretence, since he has no motive for exertion. And he as good as gives up his friendship and intimacy with me, which I WON'T stand. I come to ask you to give me back my friend—not a haggard, indifferent, cynical man, but Edmund, bright and affectionate as of old, clear of intellect, ambitious of distinction, active in benevolence, and eager in the use and enjoyment of life. Margaret, I demand Edmund Noel at your hands. Restore him to me as he was, or I can never love you more.'

'How am I to do all this?' asked Margaret, bewildered by her friend's impetuosity, and wondering what her meaning could be, seeing that Sophia had allowed that there could be no love between Noel and herself.

'How? By marrying him, and making a man of him again.'

'Is that your idea of my duty?' she asked, faintly.

'Most decidedly. Is it so very distasteful to you?'

'It is very difficult.'

'Why?'

'Can you not imagine?' And as she spoke, a soft, warm, rosy hue spread over her whole countenance, and, bending downwards, she hid her face in her hands.

A light flashed upon Sophia. It seemed to her that she must have been blind never to have suspected before. She exclaimed, loudly,—

'Is it possible? Can it be that you love him?'

'Please don't,' murmured poor Margaret, her face still buried.

'Why not? I must know. Speak!' And then, more gently,—

'Dearest Margaret, you need not fear to tell me. Am I not as his own sister?'

Raising the sweet face, smiling through its tears, she said, imploringly,—

'Do not blame me; I cannot help it. I love him with my whole soul.'

'I see, I see. And it is this poor foolish timidity that you are allowing to work his misery and yours. Pray, what did he say to you when he came to Rome last month? Did he ask you to marry him?'

'Yes,' was the scarcely audible reply, as of a conscious culprit.

'And you refused him?'

Margaret was silent. Sophia repeated her question.

'Refused him while loving him! and why, pray?'

'Because I loved him. I—I thought he might do so much better for himself.'

'Oh, this self-sacrifice!' almost groaned Sophia. 'What fools we women make of ourselves with it. But now that your "duty" takes another shape, I hope you will be equally ready to perform it.'

'Why, what can I possibly do? You would not have me seek him? Besides, you must see, that with all London before him he can do so much better.'

'I suspect he thinks that he might search a hundred Londons through, and not find another Margaret. And I am very much of the same opinion. There! No, no, darling. I will make you both happy without your taking a step yourself, and want no other reward than to see you so. But you must come home with me.'

'No, no, not now; I cannot.'

'I do not see that it is at all so unlikely that I should come and persuade you to return to us, as to betray a special purpose. Have you anything to detain you beyond a sentiment? By the bye, how have you occupied yourself all this time?'

'I will show you some of my work to-morrow morning. And in the mean time I must think. You must have some rest. I shall send you to bed at once.'

As they parted for the night, the kisses which they exchanged showed more depth of affection than they had ever before been conscious of for each other. They were both true and both women.

Next morning Margaret, who had passed the greater part of the night in pondering, told Sophia that she could not see her way to returning to England just yet. 'You are so much quicker than I am,' she said, 'and see the way through difficulties of which I see only the commencement. If only for the sake of my own satisfaction, I must remain a while longer in Rome. It is important, too, for the children, that they do not return to England before the season gets milder.'

'Well, perhaps you are right. Edmund is not a man to be taken by storm. So I will go back without you.'

'And now come and see my paintings,' said Margaret, leading the way to her studio.

Three or four pictures, large and small, copies of the best works of the best masters, were ranged round the room. Sophia did not care for these, admirably as Margaret had done them; but pointing to some draperies, asked what they concealed. Margaret raised one, and revealed a portrait of Lady Bevan.

Sophia was in ecstasies.

'You have got her exactly. Her dear calm quiet air, and serene elderly grace, and that cap,—it is all to the life. How pleased she will be!'

'I am a little doubtful of this one,' said Margaret, uncovering another.

'You have made me too handsome, my dear,' said Sophia. 'I am afraid any one who sees that first will be disappointed on seeing me afterwards. But it is very good; and all from memory, too?'

'Well, I confess I studied you a little, and made some sketches for it when first we came to Rome. I have yet another,' she said, with a blush, 'and one that I should not have shown you yesterday.'

And withdrawing a curtain, she exhibited a picture of Edmund Noel, life-size, and nearly half-length. Sophia gazed at it in silent amazement, an unusual phenomenon for her, as she afterwards remarked; and at length turning to Margaret, said,—

'This has indeed been a labour of love. Love lives in every

line of it. Commend me to Rome, if this be the kind of penance inflicted here.'

'And do you think it has been no penance to me?' asked Margaret. 'I meant this for a wedding present to his wife. Since he was here I have not dared to look at it. But you must not tell him,' she added, hastily; 'all this is in confidence, like the rest of our revelations.'

CHAPTER IX.

SOPHIA gone, on receiving Margaret's promise to follow later in the spring, and undertaking on her part to maintain a strict reserve towards Edmund, Margaret was no sooner left at leisure to indulge in meditation, than she began to repent of her confidences. To a certain extent it had been a pleasure and a relief to her to make them. She had never made a close friend of one of her own sex before. Her whole life was a sealed book to all except the one love, and it seemed to her to be a sort of treason to him to let any one come into their secret. For a moment she resented it as an intrusion, but she found consolation in the thought that it was by virtue of the very energy of Sophia's sympathy and affection for Edmund that her confidence had been won. And, after all, what did Sophia know? That Edmund wished to marry her, and that she, though caring for him, had refused him for what she deemed his own good.

But what would he say to Sophia's interposition? And how could she meet him again, knowing that their love was no longer a secret to themselves? Sophia evidently had an idea that there were no further difficulties in their path; and indeed, the difficulties and objections which Margaret had nourished alone, had vanished in the presence of the practical woman of the world, only, as now seemed, to re-appear in greater force. She was so certain before that she would not be doing her best possible by Noel in linking her own sad and harassed life to his fresh and hopeful one. It would be to wed the past to the future, and burden his career with the weight of her own retrospections.

And now, to these thoughts were added a fear of the intensity of the happiness that had burst upon her, when Sophia had for a moment so abruptly brushed aside the intervening veil of her scruples. She had never allowed herself to think of it before as a possibility. The brief vision of its realisation now aroused in her a sort of holy awe. She shrank from it as one who deemed herself unworthy: and never, probably, at any moment of her life had Noel's offer of himself so small a chance of acceptance as in the days that followed immediately upon Sophia's visit.

Those days of self-communing were suddenly cut short. By dint of intense and unrelaxing application, Noel had reached the conclusion of his book. In it he had written the history of Margaret as it appeared to him. Her character, and all her relations to himself and to James, there lay bare and open as seen by the omniscient eye of love. One sentence, the concluding one, remained unfinished. He would take his manuscript to Margaret, and call upon her to add the word on which hung the completion of his book, the crown and perfection of his life.

Sophia, on her return from Rome, called at Noel's dwelling, to find that he had left town some days previously, saying only that he should probably be absent for some time. Not having anticipated missing him in this way, she returned to Devonshire in a pet of impatience at the idea of her benevolent design being balked by Edmund's inexplicable waywardness. She little thought that she had passed him midway on the road to Rome, and that he was, at this very moment, anxiously awaiting Margaret's verdict on his book and himself.

Margaret was once more roused from her reflections by the receipt of a parcel and a letter. The parcel contained the manuscript of Noel's book, which he had himself brought to her door. The letter ran thus:—

'Remembering our old talks, dearest friend, you will understand me when I say that I am unable to take any other view of the relations between man, the world, and art (whose triple combination for me constitutes religion), than this:—that it is a duty for any one whose experience has revealed to him aught that appears to him full of beauty and excellence, real or imagined, suggested or enacted, to give expression to it,

so far as he has ability. A beautiful example should never be lost. It is the province of art to represent it over and over again, for the edification of the generations. How many a life of sorrow and suffering, and even of error, may be sanctified and redeemed by being exalted into an art-example for others. Thus, if I am filled with a conviction that I have seen characters more noble, situations more difficult, and the conduct in them more beautiful, or suggestive of a higher moral beauty, than have been witnessed by many, it seems to me a duty to draw them in such colours as may win man to loftier contemplation than that of the common or the unclean. And if such example be in some way afforded by the experience of any whom one dearly loves, surely there is an additional motive for representing it in its best and noblest aspects.

'I want your judgment on my work. You once promised, or "threatened," to paint my portrait. Here I have attempted yours, as seen by me in my heart of hearts. I do not pretend to have succeeded as I desire. There is not a page but seems cold and harsh, in comparison with the feeling that prompted the attempt. All I claim is, not to have flattered you. I claim perfect faithfulness in my copy of the Margaret who is so proud of spirit that she revolts from the idea of her humanity; who wants to be a saint without the ability to be a sinner; and reckons the very capacity for a feeling which, if yielded to, would cause her to fall, as lowering her to the level of those who have fallen: the Margaret who, with feminine logic, confounds temptation with trespass, victory with defeat, or rather not defeat—that implies resistance—but with cowardly flight and surrender: and so claims rank among the negations of an unhuman perfection.

'Though the end be still in suspense, the moral is plain: "Live up to one's best, and perchance a reward may come—a reward even beyond that of so living. Live otherwise, and reward is impossible."

'But for the end. Have my hero and heroine earned the right to be happy together, or have they forfeited it? Margaret, they await your sentence—to me the sentence of more than life or death. In one week I return to learn the word with which you will have finished my work.

'And in deciding, do not be unmindful of the following thought and its illustration. Self-sacrifice for its own sake is not virtue. A thing is not wrong because it is pleasant. For

you, even on your own theory, virtue would consist in doing that which you like, so strongly does your preference set in the opposite direction. It is related somewhere, that a knight once set forth from his home, its duties, and its delights, in quest of the Sangrail. After undergoing incredible dangers and hardships, in a manner that stamped him a hero of loftiest prowess, he returned home without having been vouchsafed a glimpse of that which alone he cared to behold. In his dejection at his failure, he dared not lift his eyes from the ground to meet the loving glances which were ever gazing for him from his castle windows. Reaching his gateway, he found crouching beneath it a group of starving wretches, who, flying from the tyranny of a neighbouring lord, had just dragged themselves thither for succour. Seeing their misery, and hearing the dismal story of their wrongs, his compassion strove with his indignation for expression; and, wearied as he was, even before permitting himself to be attended on, he provided them with food and comforts, and vowed a solemn vow to lose no time in redressing their wrongs, and punishing the evil lord. And as he raised his arm aloft in noble enthusiasm to swear his vow, his haggard face became transfigured into a glory, for he saw the heavens opened, and the Sangrail, bright and throbbing with beams of rosy light, descending towards him. Then he knew that he had been urged on his far and venturous quest rather by the spirit of a selfish devoteeism than by that of a sympathetic humanity. And so he learnt that his happiness and his blessing lay in his duty, and that his duty was not so far to seek.'

Reader, the story which Noel had written, and which Margaret read, shedding over it many burning tears, differed little from the story we have followed thus far. 'Is she to be blamed if she lacked the heart to blot out one word, or, thus appealed to, to refuse to complete the unfinished sentence with a trembling assent?

When, at the expiration of the week, Noel presented himself for judgment, he found Margaret alone. It was in the garb wherewith she was attired that Noel first read his acceptance. For, as he entered the room, she sat looking down, so that he could not see her face; but the dress that she wore was the one in which she had first beheld him, when they met, riding in the

mountain forest of Dolóres; the head partially covered with a long black Spanish veil, from behind which the rich masses of her hair freely escaped.

He knelt adoringly before her, and she bent over him, and each murmured words audible only to the heart of each. At length he asked,—

'And have you finished my sentence thus?'

Margaret rose and led him into the adjoining room, her studio. There, upon a little Mosaic table, close by the easel on which stood her painting of Noel, lay his manuscript, with pen and ink beside it.

'See,' she said, smiling. 'While you have been drawing my portrait, I have painted yours. I wonder which of us has flattered the other most?'

Noel stood for some time gazing at the picture, his arm clasped around Margaret, and pressing her close to his side.

'I did not mean you to see it so soon,' she added. 'Not until you had a wife to whom I could give it, or you were a very, very old man.'

Noel turned to the manuscript. It lay open at the last page. The final sentence, which he had written in a large and hurried hand, ran thus:—

'I ask of you a greater sacrifice than any you have yet made, or offered. I ask you to abandon all your cherished schemes of self-abnegation and mortification, and return to the world of life and love. Can you consent thus to give up your own misery to secure my happiness? If I seem to you too selfish in asking so much, think of me as the drowning wretch whose all of hope is placed in reaching you. Oh, Margaret, my only beloved, now and for ever; abandon me, and I sink indeed. What then will your reflections be? But stretch out your dear hand, and life once more is heaven. Beware, Margaret, lest your native austerity betray you into a selfishness, the indulgence of which will prove as a rock whereon to wreck for ever the life of the one whom you love and who loves you best. Will you give me your hand to keep and to cherish as my best stay and dearest possession? Margaret, will you be my wife?'

Looking close for the expected answer, Noel found written in delicate hand, and in faintest pencilling, as if experimentally, to see how it looked,—

'I will.'

'It is to be irrevocable. I must have it in deeper and firmer lines. Let me see you write it.' And he placed the pen in her hand.

When she had written it in ink, he kissed the little letters, kissed the hand that trembling had traced them, kissed at last the lips that now were his own for ever. He would have kissed them again and again, but Margaret interrupted him, exclaiming,

'But Sophia! what will she say to it? You cannot publish without her consent.'

'Publish what?—the banns?'

'No, no, the book.'

'Ah, Sophy always twitted me with not making use of my friends. She, too, is genuine and feminine, and loves a bit of self-sacrifice. She will not grudge me this one. Besides, if you do not object, I do not think that she can.'

'I can imagine her thinking differently. But her leave must certainly be obtained.'

'I see you are a little doubtful. Yet I have made her almost a heroine.'

'Nay, I think quite. But there is no need for haste. Perhaps, after two or three years, you can show it to her—or when she perhaps is married too; and it will seem as if written in that interval. Has it not achieved a sufficient purpose for the present?'

The first post that returned from England brought Margaret this note:—

'Only just a line now, dearest, to say that mamma is so pleased. I need not tell you that I am. Only I feel just a very little bit like the school child at a feast who complains to its comrade, "It's not fair. You are helped twice before I am helped once." But never mind. I dare say Edmund will not grudge you an occasional opportunity for exercising your favourite virtue (or vice?) of self-sacrifice as his wife. I and your two angel chicks will be your bridesmaids. No, I forgot—widows don't have bridesmaids. How lucky they are not boys. It would hardly have done for the mother of a Lord Littmass to drop her title and become simply "Mrs Noel;" which, unless I very much mistake you both, is what you fully intend to do.'

'What do you think, Margaret, in reference to this last suggestion?'

'It never entered my mind at all. I cannot imagine myself ——' and here she hesitated, and her cheek kindled, and she hid her face on his shoulder.

'There are two points to be taken into consideration,' said Noel, affecting indecision; 'the particular welfare of the children, and the general value of the rank.'

'Surely,' faltered Margaret, scarce lifting her burning face from its hiding-place, 'surely it is better for children to believe in the unity of their parents, as implied by community of name, than—than——'

'Stupid that I am!' said Noel; 'I was thinking only of those which you have already. But about the other point?'

Raising her head quickly as in alarm, she said:—

'You don't grudge me your name?'

'But suppose you were an Empress?'

'It would make no difference to me.'

'Margaret, you are an Empress; and more. You are Margaret, my own Margaret.'

'I fear that is too much for me,' she said sighing; 'but, see, here is a postscript to Sophia's letter:—

'"My Roman friend, the Prince di R——, has just written to say he is in Devonshire, and may he have the honour of renewing his acquaintance with the adorable, &c., &c. I expect him to make his appearance to-morrow. Oh dear, what shall I do? I half fear your example may prove catching.'"

THE END.

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